











INDIA'S CULTURAL EMPIRE  
AND  
HER FUTURE

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(with a Foreword by Prof. Tan Yun-Shan)

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SISIRKUMAR MITRA

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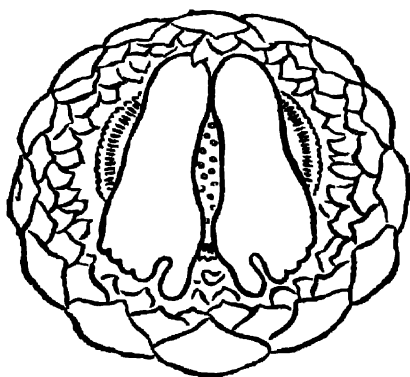


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AT  
THE LOTUS FEET OF  
THE DIVINE MOTHER  
THE SOUL AND SHAKTI OF INDIA



## PREFACE

The book was originally published under the title *The Future of India* containing two essays one of which was the same as the title and the other called *Influences of Indian Culture*. In this edition the former has been thoroughly revised and enlarged and the latter, which in the first edition was a bare outline of a long paper on the subject and much shorter than the other essay, has been completely rewritten by making full use of the whole of the original paper and adding many new materials brought to light by latest researches, so much so that its size has now grown four times its previous size. It is now even longer than the first essay. The essay *Early Contacts of India with Islam* is a new addition, which first appeared in the Second Number of the Sri Aurobindo Circle Annual, Bombay. It is included in this book as it has some bearing on the central theme of the first essay. In order to indicate the nature of the contents of the present enlarged edition a more expressive title has been given to the book. Summaries of parts of sections I and II of the essay *India's Cultural Empire* appeared in the issues of *The Indian Review* for September 1937 and April 1947 respectively. The detailed contents are a new feature of this edition.

Chief among the reasons which have occasioned the above-mentioned changes is the suggestion made by some of the reviewers of the first edition of the book that the story of India's cultural expansion ought to have received a more comprehensive treatment. The author also wanted

to emphasise the depth and extent of these influences of India and point out how they are the basis of the spiritual empire that she would build up in the future. What precise form that empire would take is not possible for the historian to say even in outline or for the reader to clearly envisage, if they do not have a vision of the truth that India enshrines in her soul.

An attempt has been made in the last essay to approach that truth from the standpoint of what Sri Aurobindo has said about it and its expression in the cultural and spiritual life of India. Indeed it is her inborn spiritual tendency which has motivated all her creative endeavours and it is in that alone that can be found the meaning and purpose of her existence in history.

The destiny of India is not in human hands. Its fulfilment depends not merely on what is done in the external sphere of life but on what the Shakti of India wills to effectuate through those instruments of hers that are open to her Influence. The political freedom is only a prelude to the much greater work India is destined to do for the spiritual welfare of mankind.

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## INDIA'S CULTURAL EMPIRE<sup>1</sup>

*"Hearken unto me, ye children of immortality, all ye who once dwelt in abodes divine, I have known the Supreme Person, the One whose light shines forth from beyond the darkness."*

IN these solémn, sublime and prophetic words the Rishi in the Upanishad voices the call from India's soul. It is a call upon all humanity to arise and awake to that heavenly vision without which life has no meaning. It is this vision which has ever been a source of inspiration to India for all the creative endeavours that she has made and made continuously for ages. It is this again which has always motivated her desire to share with others the fruits of all her cultural enterprises. Almost from the dawn of her history it has been the sole privilege of India to carry the torch of her unique ideals to distant lands and inspire them to noble adventures both in the inner and outer fields of human activity. Her matchless

<sup>1</sup> Based mainly on a paper read in 1931 before a meeting held under the joint auspices of the Greater India Society and the National Council of Education, Calcutta.



wisdom, her splendid art have left their indelible stamp on the civilisations of almost all the great peoples of history. The culture of India was like a sky-high tower of light shedding its lustre on the surrounding countries, even on those at the far ends of the earth, illumining the mind of man, exalting his heart, ennobling his life and, above all, beckoning him on to the realisation of his highest spiritual destiny. The story is indeed a romantic one of how India gave expression to this impulse of her soul and built up her cultural empire in the mind and heart of humanity.

India realised the essential oneness of the human race, and whatever she achieved, especially in her spiritual pursuits, was regarded by her as the common property of mankind. The spirit of service was ingrained in her racial being. And to her there is no greater service than what is rendered through the gift of knowledge. It was this gift which India throughout her history has generously made to all countries with whom she came in contact, without expecting any return or even an acknowledgment. The high purpose that prompted this selfless bestowing of her knowledge had its origin in her hidden intention to help mankind to the attainment of its divine goal. This inner motive as well as the effort might not have been always externally visible. But the Shakti of India has all the time been working to that secret end in her own inscrutable way. A greater India was to her a necessity for fulfilling her

highest mission. The laying of a cultural foundation for it started when Indian ideas began to spread beyond her physical frontiers and influence the thought and culture of many great peoples of history, as if to prepare the ground for the message which India would deliver in the future for the liberation of the human race. That would indeed be her crowning gift to humanity.

The sources so far available are not enough for reconstructing a complete story of how in the past India built up her cultural empire through the diffusion of her ideas in countries far and near. Nevertheless, thanks to the more liberal among the Indologists, we are now able to form some idea of it, and we shall try here to tell it in the following lines. In the first section we shall trace briefly the different ways in which India influenced the early expressions of Western thought. In the second, we shall take up a rapid survey of Indian influences in the continent of Asia. In the third and last, we shall give a short account of the spread of Indian ideas in modern times.

## I

The early history of India cannot be said to have been completely recovered from obscurity and viewed in its proper perspective. The myth that India lived in isolation has however been exploded and the fact established that from very early times she had communication with various parts of the world far and

near, her stately ships moved on the high seas, her merchants and missionaries made long treks, hazarding the perils of land-journeys in the continent with which she is geographically connected. Barriers there certainly were for India and other countries against meeting and developing between them any commerce cultural or material in those dim days of the past. Yet archaeology has brought to light sufficient evidence that India did have intercourse with Europe as early as the tenth century B.C., when ships regularly plied between the mouth of the Indus and the Persian Gulf, when the people of the west coast of India knew those of the Levant. It was not that these ships carried from India only her "ivory, apes and peacocks for the decoration of the palaces and the Temple of King Solomon". They used also to have on board her cultural ambassadors to the royal courts and seats of learning which flourished on the shores of the Mediterranean.

Persia, Asia Minor and later Alexandria were the three principal centres where in early days scholars from different parts of the world used to congregate for interchange of thoughts and ideas about religion, science and philosophy. It is now a fact of history that from times immemorial and through her commercial and maritime activities, India had communication with those countries as also with others beyond them. The existence of 'Indian Brahmins' in those countries is attested by Greek and Persian traditions which are accepted as authentic by Max Muller,

Garbe and Winternitz. Garbe thinks that the view of Thales (600 B.C.), the father of Greek philosophy, that everything springs from water, that of Anaximander, that the first principle is not water but infinite atmosphere, and that of his disciple Anaximenes, that it is air which is the source of phenomenon, are derived from almost similar Vedic theories which their Greek exponents are said to have been helped to conceive while they were in Persia on a "mission of pilgrimage for philosophical studies." The doctrine of Heraclitus (500 B.C.) that "all bodies are transformations of fire, and that everything that exists is derived from it and strives to return to it" is defined in exactly the same way in the Chhandogya Upanishad. Garbe compares this doctrine with the Sankhya theory of "the innumerable annihilations and re-formations of the Universe." Empedocles' (450 B.C.) theory of 'the eternity and indestructibility of matter' is only a restatement of the Sankhya principle of *satkaryavada* or the beginningless and endless reality of all products. He also believed in the transmigration of soul and posited the evolution of the material world out of primeval matter, which is acted upon by the three qualities, lightness, activity and heaviness, which are nothing but the three gunas, *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* of the Sankhya system.

Zenophanes (circa 575 B.C.), the father of the Eleatic School, propounded that God and the Universe are one, eternal and unchangeable. Says

Erdmann: "The absorption of all separate existence in a single substance, as is taught by the Eleatics, seems rather an echo of Indian Pantheism than a principle of Hellenic spirit." Pythagoras' (circa 550 B.C.) contact with India needs no recapitulation. We may not accept the Hindu tradition that Pythagoras was a Hindu of the Sanskrit name Prithvi-Guru who went to Greece to preach Hindu philosophy, but "there is reason to believe that he came in touch with the Brahmins" in Persia, if not in India. His doctrine of reincarnation is undoubtedly of Indian origin; so also his famous theorem (forty-seventh of Euclidean Geometry) which is embodied in the *Shukva Sutras* of Boudhayana. Jones was the first to point out the striking similarities between the theories of Pythagoras and those of the Sankhya system. Pythagoras' emphasis on number, *i.e.*, Sankhya, Jones says, indicates his Indian inspiration. Colebrooke has shown that the doctrines of Pythagoras were rooted in India. He says: "Adverting to what has come to us of the history of Pythagoras, I shall not hesitate to acknowledge an inclination to consider the Grecian to have been indebted to Indian instructors." Schrader conclusively pronounces India to be the birthplace of Pythagorean ideas.

We have it on the authority of Max Muller that Brahmins used to visit Athens about the time of Socrates (469-399 B.C.). He says: "Eusebius quotes a work on Platonic Philosophy by Aristotle, who states therein on the authority of Aristoxenos, a

pupil of Aristotle, that an Indian philosopher came to Athens and had a discussion with Socrates. There is nothing in this to excite our suspicion, and what makes the statement of Aristoxenos more plausible is the observation itself which this Indian philosopher is said to have made to Socrates. For when Socrates had told him that his philosophy consisted in enquiries about the life of man, the Indian philosopher is said to have smiled and replied that no one could understand things human who did not first understand things divine." This one instance is enough to explain the traces of Indian influence in the thought of Socrates.

Plato (427-347 B.C.), a disciple of Socrates and a great admirer of the Pythagorean School, is no less indebted to India. Plato was out on a cultural tour in the countries of Asia. It is said he visited Persia and there is a view that he was also in India for some time. His ideas of the bondage of soul to matter and its liberation therefrom, as also his doctrine of reincarnation are distinctly Sankhyan. Says Hopkins: "Plato is full of Sankhyan thought worked out by him but taken from Pythagoras." His use of the simile of the charioteer and the horses reminds us of the comparison in the Katha Upanishad "of the body with a car, the soul with the charioteer, the senses with the horses, and the mind with the reins." Urwick believes that almost all of what Plato said in his *Republic* is only a restatement of Indian ideas. Plato's division of the ideal polity into Guardians,

Auxiliaries and Craftsmen is nothing but the Hindu caste system in another garb. The simile of the Cave with which the seventh book of the *Republic* opens, reminds us of the Vedantic doctrine of Maya or Illusion. The Orphic legend that the Universe was formed in the body of Zeus, after he had swallowed Phanes, the offspring of the great 'World Egg', resembles almost exactly the story in the tenth book of the *Code of Manu* of how the Supreme Soul produced by a thought a Golden Egg (Brahmanda) from which he was born as Brahma. These similarities, says Rawlinson, are too close to be accidental. Max Muller says that the similarity between Plato's language and that of the Upanishads is sometimes startling. From the foregoing outlines we may conclude with Garbe that the historical possibility of the Grecian world of thought being influenced by India through the medium of Persia must unquestionably be granted, and with it the possibility of the above-mentioned ideas (of the Sankhya and Vedanta Philosophy) being transferred from India to Greece.

Alexandria under the Ptolemies towards the close of the third century B.C. was a far-famed seat of culture and learning. The evidences which will be enumerated below will show that the Brahmins and the Buddhists, who represented Indian culture in the great intellectual fellowship of Alexandria, contributed not inconsiderably to the growth and evolution of the fundamental principles of Christian Gnosticism and Neo-Platonism. Gnosticism has been

acknowledged to be a combination of oriental thought and certain Christian doctrines. Pliny admits in his *Natural History* that a large number of Buddhists were resident in Syria, Palestine and Egypt, and that the Gnostic School of thought of Alexandria owed not a little to the Buddhistic conceptions of man and Nature. The Gnostic idea of the plurality of heavens and spiritual worlds reflects the theory of innumerable gods or Bodhisattvas propounded by the Mahayana School of Buddhism which "undoubtedly exerted considerable influence upon the intellectual life of Alexandria." Fred. Chr. Baur says that the classification of men into three classes, according to a section of Gnostics, must have been derived from the Sankhya idea of the three gunas.

Philo (first century B.C.), an Alexandrian philosopher, who knew of Indian Gymnosophists, set forth the theory of Logos which passed into Christianity (in the Gospel of St. John) and resembles the Indian conception of *Vak* (Word) which is personified in the Rig Veda as a divine power. The Indian element in the thought of Ammonius Saccas (*circa* 200 A.D.), another Alexandrian philosopher, is traced to his contact with missionaries from distant countries including India. Ammonius was a high-souled thinker and led an austere life. Plotinus, the chief exponent of Neo-Platonism, received from him the inspiration to study "the wisdom particularly cultivated by the Indian sages." Erdmann says that Plotinus had a desire to visit India, but no mention is found in the



fragmentary account of his life whether he was able to fulfil it or not. But, thinks the same authority, there can be no doubt that he was deeply imbued with Indian mystical thought, particularly of the Vedanta School. It is said that he practised Indian methods of self-discipline and, like his master Ammonius, led a strict ascetic life and was almost always absorbed in meditation which would sometimes so deepen that he would lose himself in a spiritual trance or, to use an Indian term, a state of Samadhi. At the time of his death, he said like a Hindu Yogi: "Now I seek to lead back the self within me to the All-Self." Plotinus looks upon the world as "an outflow, a diffusion of the Divine" echoing thereby the Vedic view of the desire of the One to be Many expressed through the divine utterance "*ekoham bāhu syam*". His idea of God as the One, "the good, the pure thought, the pure actuality," corresponds with the *Sachohidananda* connotation of Brahman in the Upanishads. Plotinus declares that all worldly things are vain and void of value, and that man's chief duty lies in freeing himself from the snare of illusion under which he sees reality in the world of phenomenon, and this he can do only by deep meditation, which will lead him to "an ecstatic perception of God." This is nothing but a restatement of the doctrine of Maya and the Yoga philosophy of the Vedanta. The influence of the Sankhya thought upon Plotinus is traced by Garbe in the explanation Plotinus gave of how the world happens to be in the bondage of matter and so of sorrow and sufferings,

and of how the world could be redeemed and brought to a "state of absolute cessation of pain," which also is an echo of the Buddhistic view of Nirvana. It is not possible, Garbe thinks, to question the Indian influence on the thought of Plotinus. And it is needless to repeat what an enormous debt Western thought owes to Neo-Platonism first evolved by Plotinus.

Porphyry (232-304 A.D.), the most distinguished disciple of Plotinus, followed Indian thought more closely than his master. He was fortunate in having a personal acquaintance with the ideas of Indian Philosophy through an access he got to an important treatise on India by Bardesanes, the noted Babylonian Gnostic teacher of the early third century A.D., "who acquired authentic information about India from the Indian ambassadors who were sent to the court of Emperor Antoninus Pius." An important passage from this work, copied by Porphyry and still preserved, reveals a very intimate knowledge of the Brahmins and the Buddhists, their discipline and their mode of life. He describes, in accurate detail, the life in a Buddhist monastery, and a visit to a cave temple in western India, containing an androgynous image of the god Shiva. Porphyry developed on some scientific lines the Sankhya doctrines of the contrast between the spiritual and the material world. But his strong insistence on abstention from animal slaughter and his denunciation of sacrifice for religious merit indicate the Buddhistic bias of his mental make-up.

Buddhism was a great force in the expansion of Indian culture. The name of the Buddha "reached Bactria during the first century after his passing away"; and the presence of Buddhists in Bactria in the first century B.C., says Max Muller, is attested by several authorities. Mackenzie has shown in his book *Buddhism in Pre-Christian Britain* that Buddhism was prevalent in Britain in pre-Christian times. The ideal of *maitri*, universal brotherhood, inculcated in Buddhism, inspired Ashoka, "the first internationalist of history", to send out goodwill missions to Syria, Egypt, Cyrene, Macedonia and Epirus embracing the three continents Asia, Africa and Europe, besides Ceylon and other parts of Insulinidia and Indonesia. Many of these missionaries settled in those countries and formed large and influential Buddhist communities.

Ashoka's is indeed a unique figure in history. There has never been a monarch who loved not only his own subjects but also the whole of mankind so sincerely as this Maurya emperor of India. His unexampled concern for the spiritual welfare of humanity marks him out as one of the greatest benefactors of the human race, an earliest and most notable builder of the cultural empire of India. Ashoka proclaimed the Indian ideal of world-peace and world-fellowship when he said that all men were his children and that the true conquest lay not in the way of the sword but in the conquest of men's hearts by the law of the Dharma.

Buddhism was well known to Clement of Alexandria in the second and third centuries A.D. He repeatedly refers to the presence of the Buddhists in Alexandria, and declares that "the Greeks stole their philosophy from the barbarians." He is the first Greek to mention the Buddha by name. The Therapeutaes of Alexandria and the Essenes of Palestine, who were so well known to the Greek world, were in fact communities of Buddhist Bhikkus, practising Buddhist rites, preaching Buddhist doctrines and spreading the teachings of Gautama Buddha in the West. The word Therapeutae is only a Greek variation of the Pali word *Theraputra*, meaning son of the Buddha. The Christian historian Mahaffy says: "These Buddhist missionaries were the forerunners of the Christ." Philosophers like Schelling and Schopenhauer, and Christian thinkers like Dean Mansel and D. Millman admit that the Essenes and the Therapeutaes arose through the influence of Buddhist missionaries who had come from India particularly during the reign of Ashoka.

Evidences are now in plenty which show the influence of Buddhism on the development of the Christian faith. The parable style of the Bible is held to be an echo of the story-telling method of the Buddhist Jatakas, and that, says Vincent Smith, "some orthodox forms of Christian teaching owe some debt to the lessons of Gautama." Winternitz believes that "in the combination of the Jewish and the Greek ideas on which the

teachings of the Christian Gospels are based, there was also a small admixture of Buddhist thoughts and legends. Some undoubted borrowings from the Buddhist religious literature are also found in the Apocryphal Gospels." The strong insistence of the orthodox form of Christianity on the observance of rituals, penance, celibacy and other rigid austerities is said to have been imbibed from Buddhism. The Gospel Story of the Bible bears striking resemblance to the account of the Buddha's life given in such Buddhist works as the *Lahita Vistara*, which describe the Buddha's miraculous conception and birth, the star over his birthplace, the prophecy of the aged Asita, the temptation by Mara and the twelve disciples. But points of similarity between the Buddhist and the Christian parables are even more startling. Discussing the coincidence of the Jataka story of the pious disciple walking on the water with the similar story in the Gospels, Max Muller remarks that it can only be accounted for by some historical contact and transference, and the Jatakas are centuries older than the Gospels. The story of the Prodigal Son is found almost in the same form in the Buddhist work, the *Saddhamma Pundarika*. Another fact which confirms the possibility of Indian influence on Christianity was revealed years ago in a book called *The Unknown Life of Jesus Christ*, translated from a manuscript discovered in a monastery of Tibet by the Russian explorer, Lutovitch. The book fills up the gap of the Christ's absence from Jerusalem for twelve years by

describing his itinerary in northern India during that period when he visited India's well-known cities and centres of learning and her great saints and scholars.

It is said that fables had their origin in the East. And India had always a rich stock of them. Like her thought, her fables too have influenced those of Europe. The *Panchatantra* and the *Hitopadesha* are among the oldest folk stories, which are woven into the fabric of European literature. They reached Asia Minor as far back as the sixth century B.C., and were translated into Greek by Aesop who lived in the court of Croesus of Lydia. Some of them appear in Herodotus. A Latin version of them is ascribed to Phaedrus in the time of Tiberius and another Greek version to Babrius of Alexandria about 200 A.D. The famous Indian story *Shuka Saptati* reached Europe in Persian form in the tenth century, as also the *Arabian Nights* which contains many Indian references, and the story of Sindabad the Sailor which is of Hindu origin. La Fontaine made use of the fables of the 'Indian Sage Pilpay' which name is believed to be a corruption of Vidyapat or Vidyapati.

That these stories of India form a substantial element in those of Europe is obvious. A few examples are given below. The animals and birds such as the lion, the jackal, the elephant and the peacock, which figure prominently in them, are mostly Indian ones. In the European versions the jackal becomes the fox. The well-known Welsh story of Llewellyn and Gebert is a direct adaptation from the *Panchatantra* story of the

Mongoose and the Cobra with this variation that the dog and the wolf in the former become mongoose and cobra in the latter. La Fontaine's fable of the milk-girl building 'castles in the air' echoes the Indian story of the Brahmin Beggar. India is held to be the source of numerous fairy-tales in Grimm or Hans Anderson, including the magic mirror, the seven-leagued boots, Jack and beanstalk, and the purse of Fortunatus, many of which are found in the *Gesta Romanorum*, the *Decameron*, and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. The origin of the Pardoner's Tale is traced to the *Vedabbha Jataka*. A most striking example of the migration of a tale is furnished by the famous history of Barlaam and Josaphat, in which the Christian prince Josaphat, deeply moved by certain distressing conditions of life, renounces the world and becomes an ascetic. It was written in Greek by John of Damascus in the eighth century A.D. and was translated into Arabic during the time of Caliph Al-Mansur, and later, from Arabic into European languages. It has now been shown that Josaphat is no other than Bodhisat or Bodhisattva, and the story is that of Gautama Buddha's Great Renunciation, as told in the *Lalita Vistara*.

Not only in the realms of thought and literature, but also in those of the exact sciences, India's influence on the West in early days was no less remarkable. The so-called 'Arabic' numerals and the decimal system were first developed in India and were transmitted to Europe through the Arabs. "Zero,

the most modest and the most valuable of all numerals, is one of the subtle gifts of India to mankind." Algebra had its origin in India and came to Western Europe through the Arabs. Geometry was developed in India as early as in the Vedic age when the construction of sacrificial altars required its psychological application. Anatomy, Physiology and other branches of medical science were also highly developed by the Hindus. Dr. Royle has shown that Hippocrates, the father of Western medicine, borrowed his *Materia Medica* from India. In the time of Alexander, says Garrison, "Hindu physicians and surgeons enjoyed a well-deserved reputation for superior knowledge and skill," and even Aristotle is believed by some authorities to have been indebted to them.

The science of music was systematised in India many centuries before it could be called a science in other countries. Wagner is said to have got familiar with Hindu music through Latin translations and is indebted to it for his principal idea or "leading motive". It is not possible within the brief scope of this article to give details of the sources with their relative references through which Indian ideas on so many branches of human knowledge reached the shores of the Mediterranean in the early days of history. But the evidences cited above from Western authorities show that in every country with which she came in contact, India left the indelible stamp of her individuality.



Time was when India not only achieved great things, nay the greatest, both in the inner and outer fields of her activity, but the exalting sublimities of her culture and thought have been for ages the perennial source of inspiration to many a people for all their strivings to attain to a high degree of refined existence. There can indeed be no better acknowledgement of Europe's debt to India than the following words of Will Durant, the eminent American thinker: "India was the motherland of our race, and Sanskrit the mother of Europe's languages; she was the mother of our philosophy; mother, through the Arabs, of much of our mathematics; mother, through the Buddha, of the ideals embodied in Christianity; mother, through the village community, of self-government and democracy. Mother India is in many ways the mother of us all."

## II

Coming nearer home we find that almost the whole of the mental soil of Asia was watered and fertilised by the streams of religious and cultural ideas that flowed from India for an unbroken period of nearly two thousand years. Says Sir Aurel Stein: "The vast extent of Indian cultural influences, from Central Asia in the north to tropical Indonesia in the south, and from the borderlands of Persia to China and Japan, has shown that ancient India was the radiating centre of a civilisation which by its religious thought,

its art and literature was destined to leave its deep mark on the races wholly diverse and scattered over the greater part of Asia."

Before we begin our survey of India's cultural empire in her mother continent, we may digress for a moment to trace briefly the spread of Indian ideas in pre-historic times. The extensive maritime activities of India in the ancient world brought her into contact with many countries, such as Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, Judea and pre-historic America. Evidences are not rare which show that India had cultural intercourse with almost all of these countries. Inspiration from India is traced in the Egyptians' apotheosis of the forces behind natural phenomena, particularly of the solar deities of whom Horus is said to be a variation of Suryas, the Sanskrit word for the sun. Their god Osiris and his consort Isis are believed to be adapted from the Vedic gods Ishvara and Ishi. The ancient Egyptians had a caste system 'similar to that of India.' In the Puranas of the Hindus Egypt is mentioned as *Mishra-desha*, (a country of mixed people, so called because people from different countries used in those days to gather there for cultural and commercial purposes) from which is derived its present Indian name *Mishar*. Herodotus wrote that some of the customs of the Egyptians were essentially Aryan.

It was the Babylonians who gave the name *Sindhu* to the *Muslin* because of its being manufactured by the Aryans of Sapta-Sindhu at 'an amazingly early

period.' The story of Manu's flood, and other legends and religious traditions of India were current in ancient Babylon and Assyria. The Vedic influence is traced in the Babylonian theory of creation. The science of Astronomy in which the Babylonians excelled was a gift from the Aryanised Dravidians of India. The figure *Ana*, the highest god of the Assyrians, is said to be a symbol of Brahman of the Vedanta. The term *Asura*, deciphered in some Assyrian inscriptions, is believed by some scholars to be the Asura of the Vedas. There is also a view that the Assyrians migrated from India. The striking similarity between the central story of the Yahvist sections of the Pentateuch, Joshua and Samuel, and the Kurukshetra War of the Mahabharata has led some scholars to opine that the Semites of Judea were influenced by the Aryans of India.

Traces of Indian culture in pre-historic America lend support to the view that the word *patala* (antipodes) in the Hindu Puranas signifies America. Humboldt says that Hindu customs and manners were prevalent in America when the Europeans first founded colonies there. An icon discovered in Mexico shows that the Hindu god Ganesha was worshipped there. The art of Maya civilisation resembles in many respects some South Indian carvings. The people of India had the cipher long before the Maya people whose extreme emphasis on the Zero, says Elliot Smith, "acquires a special significance as further corroboration of America's debt to India." A sculptured

representation of a typical elephant at Copan in Central America is held to be a representation of Indian elephant with Indian embellishments and additions of a symbolic import. Sir Willian Jones says that the ancient Peruvians of South America claimed descent from a solar generation and were worshippers of the Sun-God. The greatest of their festivals was called *Rama-Sitoa*. The ancestors of the Peruvians, says Pococke, were connected with the Indians. No wonder that the story of the Ramayana should be current among the Peruvians. Chamanlal in his book *Hindu America* says: "The belief of these Americans in the four Hindu Yugas (epochs), their *Gurukula* scheme of education, *Panchayat* system, worship of Indra, Ganesha and other Hindu gods, practice of Hindu religious dances, and child-birth, marriage and death ceremonials including *Sati*, prove beyond doubt that the Hindus were the first to discover America."

Influences of Vedic culture have been traced in Boghaz Keui in Cappadocia where excavations have brought to light inscribed tablets recording a treaty concluded in the fourteenth century B.C. between two belligerent tribes known as the Hittites and the Mittanis in terms of their respective customs which included, as the inscriptions say, the invocation of the Vedic gods Mitra, Varuna, Indra and the Nasatyas (the twin Ashvins) for their blessings. From Tel-el-Amarna letters we know that between the years 1470 B.C. and 1400 B.C. there reigned in Mittani four kings whose names were Artatana, Artasuma,

Sutarna and Dasharatta, the last named must have been derived from the Sanskrit word Dasharatha. The other names also bear close resemblance to Sanskrit. These inscriptions show that Indian ideas penetrated the upper valley of the Euphrates in those early days. Before the rise of Islam, there lived in Arabia many Hindus, mostly Brahmins, who settled there observing Hindu religious customs including the worship of Shiva as Makkasha from which the name of Mecca is said to have been derived. The famous astronomer Yavanacharya was born of one such Brahmin family. It was from these Brahmins that the Arabs learnt the science of Mathematics, Astronomy Algebra and Decimal notation, which, as we have already said, were first developed in India.

Artistic treasures and manuscript materials that have yielded to the spade of the archeologist in various parts of Central Asia, at Bamiyan, Bactria, Khotan, Miran, Kucher, Turfan and Tun-huang, reveal the vastness of Indian influence in those regions. The manuscript remains of Turkestan have brought to light a formidable mass of Buddhist literature. It is now a fact of history that a large number of Indians migrated from the Punjab and Kashmir and settled in the basin of the Tarim and built up a series of cities, studying and interpreting Buddhist culture for several centuries from about the second century of the present era. Relics of numerous *stupas*, monasteries and *viharas* have been found in Khotan and its surrounding regions. It is said that Khotan derived its name from

the Sanskrit word *Go-dana* meaning gift of cows, which seems to suggest its connection with Brahminical culture. A saint of Kashmir named Virochana introduced Buddhism in Khotan which grew into an important centre of learning. Gotami-Vihara, the famous University of Mahayana studies, attracted scholars from different parts of Asia. Buddha-Sena, its Chancellor, came from India. Sanskrit and Prakrit which was then the current language of North-West India, were in use in those distant outposts of Indian culture. The Gupta and the Kharosthi were generally the prevalent scripts in most of those regions. The influence of Ajanta is traced in the frescoes of the grottos there, but the sculpture and architecture, though derived from original Indian sources, are expressed in local media. Some of the frescoes describe Jataka stories, and a number of palm-leaf manuscripts give the dramas of Ashvaghosha in the script of the Kushana period of Indian history. Another manuscript gives the whole of the Dhammapada in Prakrit. Central Asia was verily a stronghold of Indian culture, and therefore an important part of India's cultural empire.

India's cultural intercourse with China is an event of outstanding importance in the history of Asian culture, as also in that of the expansion of Indian ideas in the East. The *Manu Samhita* mentions the Chinese as degenerated Kshatriyas, and the Mahabharata calls them allies of king Bhagadatta of Assam who fought against the Pandavas in the Kurukshetra

War. The *Shaktimangala Tantra* refers to Maha-China as belonging to *Ratha-Kranta*, one of the divisions of greater India. There is a view that China was a centre of Tantrik culture and that the idea of the Universal Mother in Taoism is an echo of it. But recorded history ascribes the commencement of India's contact with China to the year 60 A.D. in which the Chinese Emperor Ming-ti saw a vision of the Buddha and sent a delegation to India for collecting information about Buddhism. Since then China began to be visited by scholars and missionaries from India, and India, by devout pilgrims and religious seekers from China, with the result that these two oldest peoples of history became united by a deep bond of cultural friendship.

It is interesting that the earliest missionaries of Indian culture to China were, many of them, monks of mixed race-origin, having connections with the nomad tribes of Central Asia, particularly the Scythians and the Yue-Chi. Indian culture had already struck deep root among these tribes even before it reached China in the historical period. The first Indian scholars to arrive in China were Kasyapa Matanga and Dharmaraksha of Scytho-Indian parentage. And the first Buddhist monastery in China was the one built in their honour. It became the most important centre of Sino-Indian cultural collaboration for more than three centuries. With the spread of Buddhism in China other centres were soon established in different parts of the country, in all of which

the main work done was the study of Indian texts and their translation into Chinese.

Kashmir, then a renowned seat of Sanskrit learning and Buddhist studies, supplied the bulk of Indian scholars who in the earlier period took a leading part in the dissemination of Indian culture in China. Madhya-desha and Gandhara were not without their share in this noble mission. The four centuries of T'ang reign in China was the most glorious period of Sino-Indian cultural fellowship, during which Buddhism was in a most flourishing condition in China. There were thousands of Indian merchants, monks and scholars in the metropolitan cities of China. Many eminent scholars of the Nalanda University were working in China during this period, and the result of their work is found in the Chinese Buddhist Canon which contains thousands of volumes of translations of Indian texts whose originals were lost in India owing to the depredations of Mahomedan iconoclasts who destroyed hundreds of Buddhist seats of learning in northern India, including the world-famous Nalanda University. India now looks to China for recovering those vast literary treasures of her past. In fact, the work has been already started in Visva-Bharati—that glorious expression of Tagore's vision of cultural fellowship—under the direction of the eminent Chinese sayant Prof. Tan Yun-Shan.

Indian influence in China is not confined to the sphere of religion. It is evident also in her arts and crafts, in her music and sciences. Inspiration from



India is obvious in the stone sculptures and bas-reliefs of the Han period before which the art of China was generally in bronze, wood and jade. The Tun-huang and Yun-kang grottos contain superb relics of Buddhist sculptures, which reflect direct influence from India. The pagoda type of temples, so much in vogue in China, is regarded by some scholars as of Indian origin. One type of such storied structures was in fact known in China as well as in Japan as "Indian style of architecture." The old paintings in the caves called Tzu-hsia Tung near Nanking and in the famous Pagoda in Kai-fong depict figures looking like and dressed exactly as Bengali Brahmins. The paintings in them of religious musical gatherings resemble in every way the figures of the Sankirtan singers of Bengal. The eminent artist, Nandalal Bose, who visited these temples, is of opinion that these pictures are without doubt those of Bengalis. Inscriptions, including those of Tantrik *mantras* in Bengali letters in a temple in Peking called Wu Ta-ssu, (that is, roofed over by a group of five spires), which is built in the famous Pancha-ratna (five jewels, *i.e.*, five spires) style of Bengal, show the influence of Bengal in China. The nobles of ancient China were great patrons of Indian music, and especially of the stringed instruments and certain modes of dancing, which had been adopted by the Chinese. The study of Indian astronomy and mathematics was encouraged in China. A T'ang emperor appointed several Indian astronomers to work in the

Imperial Astronomical Bureau and help in the preparation of new official calendars. Indian arithmetical rules were translated into Chinese, as also books on Indian medicine. Many Indian drugs found place in the Chinese pharmacopoeia. Prof. Tan says that in the culture of China a deep permeation of Indian ideas is unmistakable.

From China Korea received her initiation in Buddhism about the middle of the fourth century. In Silla, an ancient city of Korea, decorations in purely Indian style can be seen today on a temple, erected by a king to commemorate an Indian priest who lived there and was described as black—probably a Dravidian Indian. Gradually Buddhist culture deepened in the soil and became in course of time the national culture of Korea.

Japan was blessed with the light of Buddhism, but not by India direct. In 538 A.D. Korea made the first official presentation of a gilt-statue of the Buddha and some beautiful banners and sacred texts to the Japanese Court as a token of her homage and friendship. The message that accompanied the gift runs as follows: "Buddha Dharma, the most excellent of all laws, which brings immeasurable benefit to all its believers, has been accepted in all lands lying between India and Korea." With the introduction of Buddhism, Japan felt the impulse of a new life, of which a distinct orientation of her arts and letters was the immediate outcome. So deep was the influence of this new cult on Japan that

the Emperor Shomu of the eighth century took pride in calling himself "the slave of the Buddhist Trinity" and erected the colossal Buddha at Nara, the largest cast-bronze statue in the world. The fresco paintings of the same period on the walls of a temple at Horiyuzi followed almost faithfully the technique and convention of Ajanta. The ancient 'Bugaku' or dance-music of Japan has been characterised as a combination of Chinese and Indian styles. The most favourite Japanese musical instrument called 'Biwa' is said to have been derived from the Indian Veena. Traces of the influence in Japan of Hindu religion could be found in the artistic figurations of Hindu gods and goddesses as Maheshwara, Kali and Saraswati which were brought to that country by the Brahmins who were invited by Japan when later she had direct intercourse with India.

About the middle of the fifth century, the marriage of a Tibetan king with a Nepalese princess who brought her Hindu gods and sometime later, with a daughter of the T'ang emperor who brought her Buddhist deities, heralded the dawn of Indian influence in Tibet, where with the progress of religion there was a marked rise of art in paintings and bronzes which kept to the traditions of Indian art. History records in glowing terms how regardless of his poor health Shrijnan Dipankar, the eminent Buddhist savant and saint of Bengal and Chancellor of the University of Vikramshila, undertook the perilous journey to Tibet at the request of its king and founded

there a School of Tantrik Buddhism. Even today in many monasteries of Tibet Dipankar is worshipped as next to the Buddha. But Dipankar had been preceded by other Indian scholars among whom may be mentioned Shantarakshita and Padmasambhava, who together visited Tibet in the eighth century and helped in spreading the doctrines of Buddhism there.

Tradition has it that in the fourth century B.C. Vijayasingha, an enterprising prince of Bengal, sailed over the rough waters of the Bay and built up a colony in Ceylon whose old name Singhal is derived from his name. Linguistic and other cultural affinities that still exist between the present Bengalees and the Sinhalese are clear enough in pointing to this ancient bond. India's political and cultural relations with Ceylon are attested by the Pali chronicles of Ceylon to whom the world is indebted for much of the literature on Hinayana Buddhism. Even to this day Ceylon continues to be a seat of Buddhist learning. In the third century B.C. Buddhism was carried to Ceylon by Mahendra, a younger brother of Ashoka. The famous Buddhist apostle Buddhaghosha, called the Shankaracharya of Buddhism, went to Ceylon about the middle of the fifth century and there edited some very important Buddhist texts of the Hinayana School, and prepared learned commentaries on them, which are held as authoritative interpretations of the Buddhist Faith. Indian influence on the art of Ceylon is clearly discernible

in the statues of the Buddha in such old centres of culture as Sigiriya, Anuradhapura, and Polonnaruwa, the last named has also a series of Hindu temples built in the Chola style at the time of the Chola occupation in the early part of the eleventh century. The frescoes of Sigiriya, executed during the reign of Kasyapa I towards the close of the fifth century, bear striking resemblance to those of Ajanta and Bagh.

It is now generally accepted that there were Hindu settlements in Burma in the first century A.D., though legendary accounts go back to a much earlier period when emigration from India to Burma had first taken place. Literary and archaeological evidences prove beyond doubt that the entire culture and civilisation of Burma was of Indian origin. According to the Ceylonese Buddhist tradition Ashoka's missionaries visited Suvarnabhumi, lower Burma. In the third century A.D. Central Burma had a Buddhist population of 100,000 families including several thousand monks. The Hindu colonisation however had begun much earlier. Written records explored in Prome, Pegu, Thaton and Pagan covering a period from the third to the tenth century A.D. show that the languages and literatures of Sanskrit and Pali and the various cults, both Brahminical and Buddhist, were most popular in those regions during that period. There were many sects belonging to Shaivism and Vaishnavism, as well as to the Hinayana and Mahayana Schools of Buddhism. Prome was

then known by its Hindu name Shrikshetra. The colonists who settled in the deltaic regions of Burma had most of them gone from Kalinga or Andhra. A prince of Benares founded his kingdom in Arakan whose ancient Indian name was Vaishali. Many kings of Burma re-christened their dominions after the names of famous Indian cities.

A vast Pali literature on different aspects of Buddhism, its doctrines, monastic discipline and philosophical speculations has been found in Burma. A long list of Sanskrit works shows that knowledge of that language was cultivated in Burma as far back as the early centuries of the present era. The influence of Sanskrit is perceptible in the Buddhist Dhammasathas (Law) which were based on Sanskrit originals, the Dharmashastras of Manu, Narada and Yajñavalkya. The art of Burma, as expressed in her architecture, sculpture and painting, is mostly Indian in spirit and workmanship. The Ananda temple in Pegu—that finest piece of sacred architecture—was, according to Duroiselle, planned and built by Indians. Everything in it, from Shikhara to basement, as well as the numerous stone sculptures found in the corridors and terra-cotta plaques adorning its basement and terraces, bears the indubitable stamp of Indian genius and craftsmanship.

Cambodia, the ancient Kambuja, was one of the earliest to receive the culture of India. The name of its river Mekong is derived from Ma-Ganga, *Ma* meaning mother, an appellation of the river Ganga

of India. In the first century A.D. a Brahmin called Kaundinya came to Kambuja from the Pallava capital of Kanchi in South India, married a princess there and was elected king of the country by its people. But the organised Indianisation of Kambuja is attributed to Shrutavarman who ruled there in the fifth century. Bilingual inscriptions in South Indian (Pallava) script reveal a knowledge of the Vedas, the Puranas and the Epics. Kambuja rulers followed Kautilya's *Artha Shastra*—Hindu Polity—in administering the country. Pauranik Hinduism was the popular religion of the people. Shaivism had however more adherents than Vaishnavism or Buddhism. The worship of Shiva-Vishnu was a peculiar feature of the religious practices prevalent in Kambuja. A general form of the Hindu caste system was the basis of its social structure. Sanskrit language and literature were widely cultivated, and mention is made in the inscriptions of the Dharma-shastras as also of treatises on Hindu science and medicine.

A careful study of the inscriptions brings out the fact that the people were generally of a religious turn of mind and that in many of them there was an earnest endeavour to attain the spiritual end of life. The intimate association between the secular and spiritual heads is an interesting characteristic of Kambuja Court-life, reminding one, as it does, of a similar practice in ancient India. In their early life the kings of Kambuja, like those of India, had to receive their training under eminent religious

*acharyas*. Kambuja had many *ashramas*, centres of learning, which were richly endowed by kings and presided over by Brahmin sages.

The early temples of Kambuja resemble the Gupta temples of India, though their sculpture is more Gupta in style than their architecture. Groslier is of opinion that the images and temples of the later period are the work of the artists and craftsmen brought by the Indian colonists. The divine expression, especially the smile of the figures suggesting inward illumination or peace of the supreme Buddhist beatitude, is a remarkable feature of Kambuja sculpture. The Brahminical images too are marked by the same quality. And do not these images both Buddhistic and Brahminical reflect the heavenly splendour of their Indian prototypes? The scenes in the bas-reliefs which adorn the temples are almost all of them drawn from Indian Epics. The most famous of the monuments of Kambuja is the Angkor Vat—that wonderful epic in stone—which was built in the twelfth century by king Suryavarman II. It is a marvellous combination of the styles of India's temple architecture prevailing in the north and the south.

It was in the first century of the present era that Indian ideas began to flow out to Siam and permeate her mental soil. Much interest attaches to the fact that the predominant influence which the culture of India exercised all over the country exists even to this day. Temples and sculptures both Brahminical



and Buddhistic, all done in the Gupta style, have been found all over the country. A Sanskrit inscription of the fourth century along with Shaiva and Vaishnavite sculptures are among the finds in Mung Si Tep, near Pechabun. Sculptures in bronze have also been unearthed in many places. The Bronze Buddha image found in Pong Tuk belongs to the Amaravati School of art of the second century A. D. The sculpture of the Dwaravati period (seventh century) is derived from the Gupta art of the Saranath School. The temple architecture of Siam is a curious blend of the Shikhara styles of the North and South India. The two Yunan bells of the eleventh century with inscriptions in Chinese and Sanskrit are striking evidences of the influence of Buddhism. The king of Nan-Chao had the title Maharaja and also another Hindu title which means the king of the east. The Hindu idea of Mount Meru as the centre of the universe is even now a common theme of Siamese religious books and paintings. The Ramayana episodes are illustrated on the walls of the Royal temples at Bangkok. The Swing festival of the Hindus in the spring season is still extant in Siam with slight local variations.

Champa, the present province of Annam, figures prominently in the story of India's cultural expansion. It was about the second century A.D. that Indian ideas began to enter this region. The dynastic history of its kings is full of Hindu names who ruled over the land for centuries, but more remarkable is the way in which they helped to extend the cultural

empire of India in Champa. Literary and inscrip-tional evidences show that the Indian colonists in Champa tried to build up a society of the orthodox Hindu type. The Hindu caste system dividing the people into four principal castes was there in a slightly modified form. As in India, the Kshatriyas were sometimes given a superior position in society. The ideals of marriage, the relation of husband and wife were distinctly Hindu. The *sati* system was also pre-valent there. The various forms of dance and music in Champa were direct borrowings from India.

Sanskrit language and literature were highly cul-tivated in Champa and the language of the court was also Sanskrit. The Sanskrit inscriptions, more than one hundred discovered there, show that books were not only imported from India but many new ones in Sanskrit were also written there. The kings like Bhadravarman, Indravarman and Indravarmadeva, were versed in the Vedas and other branches of Sans-krit literature. The great Epics of India, the Puranas and the texts of Mahayana Buddhism were familiar subjects of study in Champa.

Shaivism was among the most popular cults of Champa. In fact, Shiva as Bhadreswara was regarded for centuries as a national god. Shakti, Mahadevi, had not an unimportant place in the religious life of Champa. There were worshippers of Vishnu too. Following the Hindu tradition, some of the kings proclaimed themselves as incarnations of Vishnu. Evidences of Buddhist influence in Champa are no-

less remarkable. And it would be enough if we mention one of them. A victorious Chinese general carried away as many as 1350 Buddhist works from Champa. The temples of the country evolved out of the South Indian style in the Mamallapuram Rathas and of the temples of Conjeevaram and Badami. In some of them could be traced the shikhara style of North India.

The group of islands known as Malay Archipelago is another renowned outpost of Indian culture. The Indian immigrants there are still called Orang-Kling, a survival of the name Kalinga by which the people of Orissa were known. In the third century A.D. the Kalingas and the Andhras of Orissa and Vengi laid the foundations of Indian and Indianised states in these islands. Shrivijaya, modern Sumatra, was a well-known seat of Buddhist culture where as many as one thousand Bhikkus had settled and formed a community for the study and practice of Buddhism. The fame of this culture-centre attracted scholars from all parts of India and Asia. A most notable visitor to it was Shrijnan Dipankar, the Chancellor of the University of Vikramashila in Bengal. Dipankar met there Acharya Chandrakirti, the eminent Buddhist scholar. He declared Shrivijaya as the headquarters of Buddhism in the East. Dharmapala of the University of Nalanda is said to have passed his last days at Sumatra.

The expansive movement of Indian culture witnessed its heyday in Java, the Hindu basis of whose

culture is a marvel of India's cultural colonisation. It was a prince of Kalinga who inaugurated this movement by founding a Hindu state in Java in the first century of the present era. Later, there came into existence another Hindu kingdom in central Java, which was called Ho-ling or Kalinga, after the name of the original homeland of the colonists. In the fourth century when Fa-hien visited Java, he found Brahminism flourishing there. It was Gunavarman, a prince of Kashmir, who introduced Buddhism into Java by first converting the queen-mother to Buddhism. The art, language, literature, political and social institutions of Java bear an unmistakable impress of Indian ideas even to this day. The spirit of Javanese poetry, drama, music, and dancing is directly Indian, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata having played a most prominent part in the development of these forms of fine art in Java. The Epics of the Hindus as well as many of their Puranas are still available in Java in Javanese versions. Some of the scientific and medical texts of India are among the literary remains of ancient Java.

Shiva was a popular deity of the ancient Javanese; so also was Shakti or Devi. The images of Ganesha and Kartikeya, the war-god, have been found in Java. Vishnu with his carrier Garuda, as also his ten incarnations are represented in the sculptures found there. Later, Mahayana Buddhism dominated the religious life of Java. The Shailendra kings of Java were in close touch with the political powers

of India. Under their patronage a large number of Buddhist preachers hailing from Bengal, exercised an enormous influence on Javanese Buddhism.

The art of Java is a most glorious creation of Indo-Javanese collaboration. Indian influence on it is as distinct as it is powerful. It excelled in sculpture and architecture and evolved forms that are a marvel of the artistic expression of the culture from which it derived its theme and inspiration. The temples of Dieug plateau, called after the heroes and heroines of the Mahabharata, look like direct adaptations from Indian temples of the Gupta period. The Brahminical images in them are more Indian than Javanese. The famous Barabudur is a veritable masterpiece of temple architecture and the greatest monument of Indo-Javanese art. Fergusson holds that the builders of the temples of Java including Barabudur came from eastern India. The sculptures in Barabudur describe the life and deeds of the Buddha, Jataka stories, etc. Its images of the Buddha are among the finest examples of Indo-Javanese sculpture, having, as they do, the classical excellence of the similar figuration evolved in India.

Indian influence in Borneo is attested by several Sanskrit inscriptions of the fifth century A.D. acknowledging gifts of gold and cows to Brahmins. It is said that Brahmins formed an important element of the population there and Brahminical rites and ceremonies found great favour at the Court. Sandstone images unearthed in Borneo, include those of

the Hindu gods as Shiva, Ganesha Nandi, Agastya, Brahma and Mahakala. A few among them are Buddhistic.

The island of Bali stands unique in the history of India's cultural empire, since it is the only colony which is still Hindu in its culture and civilisation, a fact which is enough to show how deeply did Indian ideas penetrate into the life of the people of this island. The evening gatherings of men and women to hear readings from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata recall similar scenes in India. Bali had her Hindu initiation direct from India. Her conquest by Java later helped to deepen this influence.

Researches into the cultural and racial origins of the Philippines are more and more lending support to the view that the country was once colonised by the people from South India. That the former had some relation with the latter is evident from the fact that the scripts of the Filipino have striking similarities with those of South India. Justice Romualdez, a distinguished Filipino, says: "Our dialects belong to the Dravidian family." The names of some of the places on the shores of the Manila Bay and the coast of Luzon show their Sanskrit origin. Saleeby says: "The head-gods of the Indian triad and the earliest Vedic gods hold the foremost place in the minds and devotions of the hill-tribes of Luzon and Mindanao." The statue of a Hindu god, preserved at the Ateneo de Manila, is held by a Dutch archaeologist to be that of Ganesha.

According to Kroeber, most of the folklore of the Philippines is of Hindu origin. Indian influence is most obvious in the handicrafts and in the old names of the coins used there. Many of the social and religious customs at present current in the Philippines bear close resemblance to those of India. Beyer says: "India has most profoundly affected the Philippine civilisation."

Indian influence in Polynesia, a group of islands in Oceania, was unknown to Indian scholars till a few years ago when the late P. Mitra of the Calcutta University took up the subject and in collaboration with some Polynesian scholars unravelled the story of the spread of Indian ideas in those distant islands. It is difficult to say exactly when this intercourse began. The islands were reached by man sometime during the early centuries of the present era. The physical appearance of the Polynesians is more like that of the Indo-Aryans than that of the peoples of the neighbouring islands. And their language had closer affinity to the language of the tribes like the Mundas and the Santhals of India. Many of the religious beliefs and social customs of the Polynesians are held to have been derived from India through Indonesia. Their use of conch-shell, nose-flute and musical bore are likely to have gone from India. The Hula dance of Hawaii and the Shiva dance of Samoa are very much similar to some form of folk-dances of Bengal. Skinner says that many decorative designs of the Polynesians are traceable to India and Cambodia.

Some of the staple foodstuffs and domestic animals of Polynesia are, according to specialists on the subject, indigenous to India from where they were carried to Polynesia. In the mythology of the Polynesians are found the idea of Brahmanda or Cosmic Egg of the Hindu Purana and the Gita's conception of the world as the branches of a tree of which the roots are in the Brahmanda. Craighill Handy says: "As examples of old Polynesian culture-traits derived from the Brahminical civilisation, I may mention the craft traditions, rites for the first-born, the ancestral cult with its use of genealogies and images, phallic symbolism and representative symbolic art, ritualistic conventions, priestly traditions and orders, *mana* and *Tapu*, walled temple with tower-like shrines, . . . . . and finally the remarkable dualistic evolutionary cosmogony."

### III

The story of India's cultural empire does not end with the dawn of the modern age or with the political changes that then took place in the countries of Asia and other parts of the world. It is true that the impact of European culture tended to create a new outlook in many of them, but the fact cannot be doubted that the contribution of India to the culture and civilisation of mankind has come to stay as a perennial

<sup>1</sup> References to persons and institutions in this section relate most of them to the period before the Second World War.



source of inspiration. Though centuries of Muslim rule in India gave a set-back to the movement of her cultural expansion, yet the work done by the forebears of the race was enough to lay the cultural foundation of the larger empire of the Spirit which India was to build up in the future. There can indeed be no better acknowledgment of this debt to India by the countries of the world today than the ready response they are making to her call upon them to rise into greater endeavours, to wake up to the truths of a higher life. In the recent Inter-Asian Conference in Delhi, the representatives of almost all the countries of Asia expressed in one voice and in the language of their heart their 'unbounded gratefulness' to India, 'the Mother of our culture and civilisation.' The seeing minds of Europe and America have already begun to appreciate the unique greatness of India in the world of the Spirit. Her stupendous cultural achievements in the past have found their votaries in these continents.

The year 1671 is a landmark from which to date the beginning of a new phase in the movement of India's cultural expansion in modern times. It was in this year that the French traveller Bernier carried to France a manuscript translation of the Upanishads in Persian by the Mughal prince Dara Shukoh. He was followed by several French missionaries and German Jesuits who published translations of Vedic and other Sanskrit texts, one of the latter having written a Sanskrit Grammar too. Voltaire's love of

India and her wisdom, and later, Amiel's insistence on the need of 'Brahmanising souls' for the spiritual uplift of humanity, are doubtless due to their contact with Indian thought they had through the above and other sources which began to multiply with the growth of Europe's interest in India, commercial at the beginning, then proselytising, afterwards cultural, when the superiority of Indian thought became more and more evident to the scholars of Europe.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the most outstanding figures who brought to light the wide range of Sanskrit literature and organised its systematic study and dissemination were the three Englishmen, Sir Charles Wilkins, Sir William Jones and Colebrooke, all of whom 'aimed at a union of Hindu and European learning' and did much to introduce the ancient Sanskrit classics to the Western world. Wilkins' earliest work was a translation of the Gita. Jones, who founded the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784, edited, among other works, *Manu*, *Shakuntala* and several other Sanskrit plays. Colebrooke, the founder of Indian philology and archaeology, wrote extensively on various aspects of Indology and edited several Sanskrit texts, such as the grammar of Panini and *Hitopodesha*.

It was Germany which was the first in Europe to discover the hidden treasures of Sanskrit literature early in the nineteenth century and give a fresh impetus to its study, a result of which was the influence it exerted on the German thinkers. To Schopenhauer

the Upanishads came as a new *Gnosis*, a revelation, as it were. He said: "In the whole world there is no study so beneficial and so elevating as that of the Upanishads. It has been the solace of my life, it will be the solace of my death." Kant's central doctrine that things of experience are only the phenomena of the thing-in-itself has been acknowledged as essentially a doctrine of the Upanishads. The influence of Kalidasa's *Meghaduta*, "The Cloud Messenger" on Schiller's *Maria Stuart* is most obvious. Goethe modelled his Prologue to *Faust* on the prologue to Kalidasa's Sanskrit drama, *Shakuntala*, for which the German poet's rapturous praise is too well-known to require mention.

Another notable event in the expansion of Indian Culture in the nineteenth century is the American Transcendentalist movement. In Concord, Massachusetts, there used to gather in 1840's famous poets, authors and thinkers of America, to whom Emerson would read and re-read the Gita and the Upanishads. After reading Manu, Thoreau, the famous author of *Walden* and a member of Concord, wrote: "I cannot read a sentence in the book of the Hindus without being elevated." He recognised the Sankhya system as the only possible one for the masses. Walt Whitman, the poet, came into intimate contact with Emerson and had from him his initiation in Indian thought. His poem *Passage to India* is a plan for uniting the intellectual life of the West with the spiritual life of the East. And whatever Emerson himself has written

is mostly Vedanta. His essays like "The Over-Soul" and "Circles" and poems like "Brahma" are the very echoes of Upanishadic thought. He once wrote: "Nature makes a Brahmin of me presently." The Vedantic note in Carlyle's writings is too well known to require mention. And the Gita was the only book he chose to present to Emerson when the latter met him for the first time. There is a leaven of Vedantic thought in the poetry of Robert Browning: some of his lines read like paraphrases of Upanishadic verses.

Indian culture began to enter the mind of Europe and other countries more widely and deeply when in modern times distance was annihilated by quicker and easier means of communication. Indeed, the subjective tendency of the present age is to a great extent the result of the infiltration of Indian thought into the mind of humanity. An inner seeking is evident everywhere, an urge to know the deeper meaning of things. Receptive America has been able soon enough to accept and understand the light from India. In Europe the critical study and exposition of the various aspects of ancient Indian culture has taken shape in the subject of Indology. A galaxy of scholars have by their researches made invaluable contribution to the reconstruction of India's past. There have been attempts too on the part of India to interpret her culture and thought to the world, to reveal to it the truth that shines undimmed in the adytum of her soul. Among the inspired sons who voiced the message of Mother India, Swami Vivekananda

stands out as a stately tower of light. His prophetic words were: "Once more the world must be conquered by India: this is the dream of my life. . . . We must go out, we must conquer the world through our spirituality and philosophy. There is no alternative. We must do or die."

This mighty son of India, made all the more mighty by his Guru's grace, thundered out to the world the central message of the Vedanta: "Thou art That." Never before was there one who had spoken of the divinity of man with such an electrifying intensity of conviction as that soldier of the Light, that indomitable exponent of India's spirituality. His luminous interpretation of the Vedantic thought and its application to the practical life of man attracted seekers from almost every part of the world, who formed the first nucleus of a universal fellowship based on the intrinsic unity of man in the world of the Spirit. Whether it was America or England or the Continent, wherever he went, people of all classes flocked to him only to be illumined in their soul by a new light. Spiritual India, reawakened after a long sleep, found in him an inspired champion of the divine heritage of man; and the materialistic West bowed its head before the majesty and sublimity of his message. The Math and the Mission, started by the Swami with the express object of giving form to the ideal he stood for, have since grown and expanded into a network of organisations of social and spiritual service spread all over the world.

But Vivekananda's influence has always been much deeper and wider than we generally feel and know. He has been a force, a great dynamic force, from whom millions derive inspiration and the exalting strength of the divine light which he embodied. This is how he helps mankind to grow in readiness for the greater future that is to come to it as the end and consummation of its strivings through the ages. Thus by Vivekananda was given a new tempo to the work of India towards the building up of her spiritual empire in modern times.

Annie Besant dedicated almost the whole of her life to the cause of India's social, cultural and spiritual uplift. Her interpretation of Indian thought ranks her among those who have raised India in the estimation of the world. The work of the Theosophical Society in disseminating the truths of Indian culture through its centres and exponents all over the world must be recognised, as also that of the Arya Samaj which emphasised the Vedic basis of Indian life and thought. Swami Rama Tirtha, who voiced Vedantic ideas in accents of fire, is still adored in Japan and America as an inspired messenger of India. Baba Premananda Bharati's Shri Krishna Home in America attracts hundreds of devotees from various parts of that country. Yogoda is another centre of spiritual culture there. The India Society and the International School of Vedic and Allied Research, organised by the Indians in America are furthering the cause of Indian culture to which great service was

rendered by that famous Irish poet and critic, James H. Cousins, who in his lecture tours undertaken on several occasions unravelled to big American audiences the depth and profundity of India's aesthetic expressions, their psychology and motivation. The masterly and revealing exposition of Indian art and culture by Ananda Coomaraswamy has opened America and the world to the intrinsic significance of India's creative genius, of its achievements through the ages, whose subjective and objective history he has for the first time presented from the standpoint of their integrality. Coomaraswamy was verily an institution by himself, a dynamic centre of Indian values, whose influence was as wide as it was illuminating. Indeed his stay in America for nearly thirty years as the Curator of the Indian Section of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts proved to be a most fruitful factor in the expansive movement of Indian culture in that country.

Circulo Esoterico da Communhao do Pensamento in Sao Paulo, Brazil, is an institution whose professed aim is "to comprehend the spiritual wisdom of the world and particularly that of India." Lately it has organised researches into Vaishnavic thought. One of the many members of this Society who are devoted followers of Shri Chaitanya of Bengal, has started an inner circle called 'Tattva Shri Chaitanya.' Vecente Avelino who was the Consul General for Brazil in India in 1930 belonged to this circle. He was a devout Vaishnava and an ardent admirer of Shri Ramakrishna. In an address at Panihati, near Calcutta, on the

occasion of a religious festival organised by the Shri Gauranga Grantha Mandir to commemorate Shri Chaitanya's visit to that place, he said: "India is the only country which has known God and if any one wants to know God he must know India."

Ireland's interest in India deserves mention. It is said that the inborn spiritual inclination of this Celtic people is Aryan in origin and inspiration. The eminent jurist Maine has shown that the old Brehon laws of Ireland are derived from the Vedic laws of India. The infusion of Indian ideas into the mind of modern Ireland, which began towards the end of the last century, roused her sense of cultural kinship with India. This new illumination is acknowledged as one of those factors that heralded the great Irish literary and dramatic revival, which proved a powerful incentive to the political resurgence of Ireland. George Russel (A. E.) and Yeats, both poets of world-wide fame, were the two chief inaugurators of this movement. They showed a strong predilection for the spiritual thought and life of India and the poetry of A. E. at its best is literally soaked in Indian mysticism and rises to heights unattained up to now by any other Western poet.

Sir John Woodroff's achievement in the exposition of Tantrik thought cannot be over-estimated. Himself a follower of Tantrik cult, this great Englishman edited in a masterly way a number of Tantrik texts and most of his views on them are regarded as authoritative. It is mainly through his writings—a rare



combination of insight and scholarship—that the ideas of the Tantras began to enter the mind of the West in modern times. Influence of Indian thought is most obvious in the philosophical writings of well-known English thinkers of today like Gerald Heard and Aldous Huxley. Distinctly Indian is their idea of a new community of neo-Brahmins, which, according to them, is to emerge in the future as the next higher stage in the evolutionary ascent of man. In the thought of Gerald Heard there is a clear note of Sri Aurobindo's teachings. In the Yoga School, started by these two English thinkers, many Europeans are having training in Indian methods of self-discipline. The greatest English novelist, Somerset Maugham, advises prospective writers to come to India for gaining knowledge of the higher values of life.

The eminent French savant, Romain Rolland, is noted for his deep understanding of the intrinsic meaning of Indian culture. His works on Shri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda show the reverence with which he studied them, and his appreciation of these two master-men of modern India is remarkable for its perspicacity. In Sri Aurobindo he saw "the completest synthesis of the culture of the East and of the West, holding in his outstretched hands the bow of Creative Impulse, the promise of a greater Tomorrow." Paul Richard, that renowned French mystic, in the course of a talk in Paris in 1927 said: "Sri Aurobindo is verily Shiva himself. There is none like him in the whole world." Earlier in 1919

in a lecture in Tokio, he uttered the following words on Sri Aurobindo: "Now, the day is coming when after having been in the obscurity of his silence and retreat, the saviour of India, he will become in the full light of day the Guru of Asia, the Teacher of the world." India must never forget the valuable work done by French scholars in the world of Indology. Sylvain Levy's is a name that is to be cherished for ever in this connection. Institut de civilisation Indienne is a well-known institution in France which aims at promoting the study and understanding of Indian life and civilisation in its various phases of development.

The famous German thinker, Count Hermann Keyserling, declared that "India has produced the profoundest metaphysics that we know of." He spoke of "the absolute superiority of India over the West in philosophy." His School of Wisdom at Darmstadt was often attacked for the very reason that "he was transplanting Indian recognitions into the West". The Summer School for Spiritual Research in Ascona, Switzerland, has the religions of modern India as one of its special subjects of study. Swami Ananda Acharya's Ashram in Norway attracts a large number of men and women from different parts of Europe, to whom it gives not only training in India's yoga but also ideas about her culture. The Academy of Sciences of Russia and its Eastern Institute Section have for years been engaged in the study of Buddhism and other religions of India, the Epics also being

included in their subjects of research. The Eastern Institute is taking keen interest in modern Indian languages. The Kern Institute in Holland and the Oriental Institute in Italy are reputed centres of research where under the direction of eminent European scholars important original work is being done on Indian art, archaeology and literature.

Among the Indologists of Europe in the present century Sten Konow of Norway is noted for his researches on the evolution of the religious thought of India; Glassenhap of Germany for his commentaries on many Sanskrit philosophical texts including one of Madhwacharya, (his father, also an Indologist, wrote a beautiful poem on Shri Chaitanya); Winternitz of Czecho-Slovakia for his monumental work on the history of Indian literature; Tucci of Italy for his studies in Vaishnavic thought. Macdonell, Rapson and Smith are England's eminent historians of Indian culture and thought. The India Society and the recently started Society for Cultural Fellowship with India show how England wishes to deepen her cultural relations with India. It is not that the interpretation of Indian thought by these and other scholars of Europe and America has always been authentic. In fact, the spiritual, therefore the real, intention in India's cultural development has often been missed by most of them. Yet by their pioneer work they have all of them helped to rouse world's interest in India and strengthen the foundation of her cultural empire.

The rise of Rabindranath Tagore to world-wide fame is another cause of India's figuring more prominently in the intellectual horizon of humanity. Nature chose him as the one man in history to receive for his poetry the unstinted homage of the whole of mankind during his lifetime. The poet of India became the poet of the world,—a fact which together with his *Visva-Bharati* embodying his vision of the cultural oneness of mankind, has certainly furthered the cause of India's cultural expansion in modern times. "*Visva-Bharati*", in the words of the Poet, "represents India where she has her wealth of mind which is for all. *Visva-Bharati* acknowledges India's obligation to offer to others the hospitality of her best culture and India's right to accept from others their best. It is India's invitation to the world, her offer of sacrifice to the highest truth of man." Eminent scholars and Indologists including many of those mentioned above responded to this call, came and stayed there in pursuit of their respective subjects of study, imbibing all the time the life of India and the spirit of her culture. A tone of deep regard for India is perceptible in all their writings about her.

There is no doubt that the works of Radhakrishnan have enormously increased world's interest in Indian thought. The aesthetic eye of man has already opened to the splendour of ancient Indian art. Sister Nivedita and Havell are among those from outside who caught the true spirit of India's artistic expression and revealed it to humanity. A striking revival of this

spirit in the works of many modern Indian artists has won for them fame and appreciation from various parts of the world. Abanindranath Tagore, the founder of this new School of Painting, and Nandalal Bose, his worthy disciple, are the great masters, the artist-exponents of modern India's aesthetic intuitions. On seeing the famous painting "The Buddha carrying the kid" by Nandalal, shown in an exhibition in Geneva, a Swiss critic remarked: "I see behind this picture a great civilisation." India has contributed not inconsiderably to the advancement of modern Science. An Indian name is now associated with Einstein's Theory of Relativity. There are some notable Indians among the luminaries in the worlds of Physics and Chemistry. Writing about Sir J. C. Bose's discoveries on plant-life, Collum in his book *Life's Unity and Rhythm* says: "Bose is a landmark, a point from which to date the dawn of a new thought."

China's desire to renew her ancient bond of friendship with India finds expression in the writings and activities of her eminent scholars and thinkers, of whom names may be mentioned of Tan Yun-Shan, Jen Foo Kan and Ngo-Chang Lim. The foundation of the Sino-Indian Cultural Society by Prof. Tan is the great beginning of a significant movement which bids fair to usher in a new era of cultural fellowship between these two oldest peoples of history. The growth and expansion of its activities will mean preparation for a greater work in the future, the work

of building up a new, better and united world through the joint efforts of India and China. In all her social and political thinking China regarded the unity of mankind as the one aim worth striving for. Prof. Tan asserts his faith in that great ideal of his country and makes its attainment the ultimate goal of his Society. He appeals to India for help and co-operation in this noble endeavour, since he believes that India alone can give that spiritual strength without which the aim can never be realised. Relating his impressions of a visit to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, Tan said that as in the past China was spiritually conquered by a great Indian, so in the future would she be conquered by another great Indian, Sri Aurobindo, the Maha-Yogi of India, who, as he said, "is the bringer of that Light which will chase away the darkness that envelopes the world today."

Indeed the ideal Sri Aurobindo stands for is the only hope that mankind has before it at the present hour of its distress. A new Light has come to his vision, a Light that is descending on earth to remould man into a divine perfection. The gloom that thickens everywhere is the deepening darkness of the night before dawn. The chaos and conflicts are the travail of the earth before its birth into a higher consciousness. Sri Aurobindo calls upon man to wake up and be ready for this glorious consummation of his earthly existence. He works silently, helping seeking souls and preparing the inner life of humanity. And response has already started coming from different

quarters of the globe. On reading Sri Aurobindo's *magnum opus*, *The Life Divine*, the well-known English thinker Sir Francis Younghusband wrote: "I really do quite genuinely consider it the greatest book which has been produced in my time."<sup>1</sup> Chile's Nobel Laureate Gabriele Mistral says: "While Tagore awakened the latent music in me, another Indian, Sri Aurobindo, brought me to religion. He opened the way to my religious consecration. Indeed my debt to India is very great and is due in part to Tagore and in part to Sri Aurobindo."<sup>2</sup>

Of all the countries in the West, it is France that is evincing the most lively interest in Sri Aurobindo and his gospel of the divine life upon earth. Some of his books have been already translated into French and there is a growing demand for them. Is there a spiritual affinity between India and France, a secret psychic kinship? The future is big with far-reaching possibilities and it would be wilful blindness to overlook this first flutter of the soul of France at the healing and delivering touch of India's light. We have already quoted the glowing tributes of praise paid by Romain Rolland and Paul Richard to Sri Aurobindo. Here is another, no less glowing but undoubtedly more moving, from Maurice Magre, the distinguished poet, thinker and novelist of France: 'O Maître, Tu es assis dans la solitude parfaite, la éternité divine, l'extase réalisée. Mon admiration

<sup>1</sup> *The Times Literary Supplement*

<sup>2</sup> *The Aryan Path*, February, 1947

s'élève vers toi dans le silence de la nuit, vers toi qui as franchi la porte de la perfection. Dis-moi comment doit s'élever la spirale de la méditation, donne-moi une formule de prière, même une syllable à laquelle je m'accrochrai comme un nageur qui a trouvé une bouée."<sup>1</sup> These utterances are not passing effusions of a few sentimental lovers of India; they represent a real, insistent want felt by the progressive section of humanity all the world over. They are the cry of the resurging soul of man, a cry for peace and harmony in a world torn by war and discord.

The empire of the Spirit of which India has dreamt through the ages and which it is her sole privilege now to build up in the mind and heart of mankind, will become a reality and take its definite form when man turns towards the Word of the Master, the last Creative Word of India which she has been waiting since the dawn of her history to deliver for the redemption of the human race, for its liberation into a higher life of Knowledge, Bliss, Freedom and Harmony which are the very basis of India's spiritual kingdom as envisaged by Sri Aurobindo.

<sup>1</sup> *A la Poursuite de la Sagesse*. "O Master, Thou art seated in perfect solitude, divine serenity, realised ecstasy. My admiration rises towards thee in the silence of the night, towards thee who hast crossed the portals of perfection. Tell me how to ascend the spiral of meditation, give me a formula of prayer, even a syllable to which I may cling like a swimmer who has found a buoy."



## EARLY CONTACTS OF INDIA WITH ISLAM

### I

THE coming of the Muslims into India is generally associated with the first Arab invasion of Sindh early in the eighth century, but the part that the pre-Muslim Arabs played in the commerce between the East and the West had brought them into India long long before Islam was born. It is said that these Arabs had settled in Chaul, Kalyan and Supara, and that for a long time they exercised great influence on the Malabar coast. The rise of Islam freshened up this intercourse which had previously been more commercial than cultural in character though a view is held that the *Sabaeen* cult of the pre-Muslim Arabs had, to some extent, influenced the coastal people of Malabar. The new faith of Islam opened up new possibilities and India began to enter largely into the thoughts of the Caliphs. Questioned by Omar as to what he had seen in India, an Arab sailor said, "India's, rivers are pearls, her mountains rubies, her trees perfumes." But Omar was against making any attack on India, since he believed that the followers of Islam

as of other religions, were free to practise their faith in that country. As a matter of fact he rejected every proposal that was made to undertake an expedition against India by sea.

Nevertheless, the Muslim Arabs began to pay more frequent visits to the western coasts of India and their influence in Malabar rapidly grew. A story is current in Malabar that early in the ninth century the last of the Cheraman Perumal kings became a convert to Islam. A few years after his conversion he went to Arabia and died there. The Arabs whom he sent with instructions regarding the administration of his dominions were cordially received at Malabar and allowed to build mosques. This conversion of the king is still remembered in the practice followed at the installation of the Zamorin when he has himself shaved and dressed like a Muslim and crowned by a Mapilla. The Maharajahs of Travancore on receiving the sword at their coronations have still to declare: "I will keep this sword until the uncle who has gone to Mecca returns." The Zamorin became patron of the Arab traders who, in return, gave him every support in his campaigns. It is said that the Zamorin was so well-disposed towards Islam that he openly encouraged conversion among his subjects because sea-voyage being forbidden to the Hindus, local people were not to any extent available for manning the ships of the Arab merchants. He also gave orders that in every family of fishermen in his dominion one or more of the male members should be brought up as Muslims.

Appreciation of Islam by Hindu kings is testified to by Masudi who visited India early in the tenth century. He says: "The king of Cambay was interested in religious discourses and exchanged ideas with Muslims and other people who might have visited his kingdom." Regarding the Hindu king of Gujrat Masudi says: "In his kingdom Islam is respected and protected; in all parts rise the domes of beautiful mosques where Muslims worship." When the Hindus of Cambay attacked the Muslim masses, Siddha Raj punished the guilty Hindus and compensated the Muslims with money for building a new mosque.

After the invasion of Sindh by Muhammad bin Qasim, the administration was left entirely in the hands of the natives. The Hindus of Sindh appealed to Muhammad for freedom of worship. Muhammad referred it to Hajjaj, the governor of Irak, who issued the order: "Permission is given to Hindus to worship their own gods. Nobody must be forbidden or prevented from following his own religion. They may live in their houses in whatever manner they like." Von Kremer observes: "The customary honour and deference due to the Brahmins and the three per cent share in the land revenue was maintained. 'Build temples, traffic with the Muhammadans, live without any fear and strive to better yourselves in every way possible,' was the law in Abul Qasim's days and later." There cannot indeed be a better example of toleration than that which the Arabs granted to the Hindus of Sindh.

The first history of Sindh called the *Chach-Namah* is the work of an Arab historian. The Arab geographer Astakhri visited India about the middle of the tenth century. He is the author of many geographical works which contain a map of Sindh, the first of its kind. In his description of the important commercial towns of India which were inhabited by Hindus and Muslims, he said that in their social intercourse both the communities were tending towards a harmony of their manners and customs. The Hindus and the native converts dressed like the Muslims and spoke their language. In Multan, says Ibn Hauqual, the dress of the Hindus and the Muslims was the same. Politically, the Arab invasion of Sindh was not so important as its effect on the mind of the Arabs who felt attracted by the greatness of Indian civilisation and began to visit the country in order to be acquainted with the wisdom of the Hindus.

Buzurg bin Shahryar, who was in India in the ninth century says: "The Indian Rajahs are particularly well-disposed towards the Muslims. The Buddhists of Ceylon love the Muslims and are extremely kind to them. During the Caliphate of Omar they deputed two Bhikshus to Arabia to collect particulars about Islam. One of them died on the way back, and the other, on his return, expressed his admiration for the Caliph who led a simple and unostentatious life." Sulaiman, an Arab merchant who was in India about the same time said that none liked the Arabs more than the Vallabhi king of Gujrat. Buzurg bin Shahryar

says that the King Mahrug of Alor in Kashmir had the Koran translated into Hindi and used to hear the translation read to him every day. The same authority tells us about a visit to Sairaf, a port on the west of Irak, of the Hindus,—mostly Sindhis, Multanis and Gujratis,—who were invited there by Arab merchants to a dinner where special arrangements were made for their food. These Hindus struck the local people by the fluency with which they spoke colloquial Arabic.

The above is not of course the only instance of the intercourse that then existed between India and Persia. About the tenth century when Persia was conquered by Islam, the Muslims came in contact with the Buddhist population of that country and evidently gathered from them some idea of the teachings of the Buddha. These Buddhists were gradually absorbed into the pale of Islam along with many others in Khurasan and Turkestan.

The Abbasid court of Bagdad was famous for its patronage of learning, and was keenly interested in Indian culture. It invited Hindu scholars and highly appreciated their incomparable gifts in medicine and astronomy. Many of them were appointed chief physicians in the hospitals of Bagdad and were asked to translate, from Sanskrit into Arabic, various works on medicine, philosophy, astronomy, etc. Yahya-ibn-Khalid, the Barmaki minister of Harun-al-Rashid, had a treatise on the various schools of religious thought in India, as also one on the plants found in

India alone, prepared by a scholar whom he sent to India specially for the purpose. The Barmakis had been Buddhists having had their original home in Balkh, which came under Islam about the middle of the seventh century. Yahya was a Barmaki, and was, due to his Buddhistic inclinations, an enthusiastic admirer of Indian culture. He is one of the earliest to have furthered the cause of Indo-Muslim cultural friendship. And it was through his efforts as well as through the patronage of the Bagdad court that the interest of Arab scholars and historians in Indian culture was aroused and they began to visit this country in search of knowledge. These, as well as those learned men who went from India to Bagdad, carried to that country much of Indian scientific knowledge which was subsequently assimilated to the lore of Islam, in which Indian influence is considered to be more pronounced than the Greek. But everything that the Arabs received from India was given by them a new character and a new garb in which it was later transmitted to Europe.

## II

The appreciation of the religion and culture of the Hindus by the Arabic and Persian scholars shows the breadth of their outlook and the sympathy and care with which they tried to understand things Indian.

Writes Al-Jahiz (9th century):—

“The Hindus excel in astrology, mathematics,

medicine and in various other sciences. They have developed to a perfection arts like sculpture, painting and architecture. They have collections of poetry, philosophy, literature and science of morals. From India we received that book called *Kalilah wa Dimnah*. These people have judgment and are brave. They possess the virtues of cleanliness and purity. Contemplation has originated with them."

Writes Yaqubi (9th century):—

"The Hindus are superior to all other nations in intelligence and thoughtfulness. They are more exact in astronomy and astrology than any other people. The *Siddhanta* is a good proof of their intellectual powers; by this book the Greeks and the Persians have also profited. In medicine their opinion ranks first."

Writes Al-Idrisi (10th century):—

"The Hindus are by nature inclined to justice and never depart from it in their actions. Their good faith, honesty and faithfulness to their promises are well known and they are so famous for these qualities that people flock to their country from every side."

Writes Al-Beruni, who was in India for thirteen years from 1017 A. D. and who was of opinion that in the core of their teachings Hinduism and Islam are almost one:—

"The Hindus believe with regard to God that He is One, eternal, without beginning and end,

acting by freewill, almighty, all-wise, living, giving life, ruling, preserving; one who in his sovereignty is unique, beyond all likeness and unlikeness, and that he does not resemble anything nor does anything resemble him."

These revealing utterances of the Muslim scholars show how deep was their insight into Hindu life and thought and how correct their understanding of the Hindu character. They only can build up unity who can appreciate the culture of others as well as they do their own, for it is on mutual understanding alone that unity can thrive. To these high-souled Muslims India should remain grateful for the invaluable service they rendered to the cause of cultural fellowship in those medieval times, the history of which has yet to be written. Not much is known about many of these seekers of knowledge. One name however looms large before our eyes. It is that of Al-Beruni whose visit to India is a notable event in the history of Indo-Muslim friendship in the world of learning. He came to this country in quest of knowledge about Hindu sciences and philosophy and visited prominent centres of culture in Northern India including those in Kashmir, Mathura, Prayag and Ujjain. He wrote a history of India in which he described the social and religious life of the country. It is noteworthy that nowhere in the book has he said anything that might offend the Hindus. Neither had he anything to say about the political turmoil that was then raging in the country beyond a casual



reference to the havoc it did to the people. About his activities in India, Sachau, who collected and edited Al-Beruni's works, says: "It was like a magic island of quiet and impartial research in the midst of a world of clashing swords, burning towns and plundered temples." There is no doubt that in their exchange of views and in the daily talks that they had with Al-Beruni and with others who followed him and had preceded him in search of knowledge in India, the Hindu scholars had their first-hand information about Islam and the theology that was developed under its inspiration. Like an impartial scholar, Al-Beruni did not hesitate to criticise the defects that he noticed in the Hindus. He complained of their conceit and self-sufficiency hoping at the same time that "if they travelled and mixed with other nations, they would soon change their minds, for their ancestors were not as narrow-minded as the present generation is."

The Muslim saints who visited India about this time were most of them Sufis, though many divines and *deroishes* had already been in India disseminating the tenets of Islam. Many of the Sufis settled in the country leading an austere life and devoting themselves to spiritual pursuits. For the catholicity of their outlook and for the loftiness of their doctrines they became popular among both Hindus and Muslims and earned their respect. It cannot be said that they were all of them pledged to a proselytising mission. Their saintliness and liberality attracted

large numbers of Hindus, especially those whom the Hindu society neglected and could not give a human, not to speak of a respectable, status. The social organisation of the Hindus was suffering from many defects. It is to them that the cause might be traced of the growing discontent among a large section of people, which drove them to seek spiritual help from the Sufis. Many embraced Islam, and many became admirers of its liberal teachings.

Al-Hujwiri was one such illustrious saint who hailed from Ghazna and settled in Lahore which became a centre of his activity. Even today Hindus and Muslims come to pay their homage to his memory at his tomb in Lahore where he died in 1072. Hujwiri is believed to be the first teacher of Sufism in India. He emphasised complete annihilation of ego by which the seeker is to realise the all-embracing Unity and be the recipient of divine grace which will fill him with 'Godly idealism'.

Muinuddin's is another great name which is held in the highest esteem by the Sufis in India. His tomb, erected along with a shrine, is also a place of pilgrimage for both Hindus and Muslims. Akbar the Great is said to have travelled on foot to this place as a pilgrim. It is interesting that in this Sufi shrine, as in Hindu temples, music is played daily and professional female singers sing at the request of the pilgrims. The fame of Muinuddin and his spiritual activities spread over India, and even high-caste Brahmins fell under his influence. At Pushkar in Ajmer, a place of

Hindu pilgrimage, where Muinuddin lived and passed his last days, there is even today a class of people who call themselves Husaini Brahmins, who are neither orthodox Hindus nor orthodox Muslims, having belief in Hindu customs and rituals along with Muhammadan ideas and practices.

This intermingling of rites and customs indicates the beginning of a new social outlook which was initiated through the influence of the Sufis. And by drawing adherents from among both Hindus and Muslims they were able to unify into a synthetic whole the two streams, Hinduism and Islam. Thus Sufism became one of those syncretic forces which prepared the way for the greater synthesis that came into being in the spiritual world of India under the inspiring influence of the lives and teachings of the saints and mystics in medieval times. The wide popularity of Sufi idealism among the Hindus is explained among other things by the striking similarity between some of its fundamental principles and Indian thought, specially of Buddhism and Vedanta; and this was largely due to the influence of the latter on the former. It is well known that the Sufis came in touch with Buddhism in many important centres of the Muslim world. As early as the second century of the Hejra, the Arabs translated many Buddhist works. The Sufi idea of *Fana*, i.e., of total self-annihilation is distinctly a derivation from the *Nirvana* of Buddhism. The inspired utterance 'I am the Truth' of Mansur, the well-known Sufi who visited

India is only an echo of the Vedantic '*Soham*', "I am That". The yogic breathing exercises of the Hindus are followed in every detail by a section of the Sufis and their practice of remembering God and repeating His name is the same as the *Japa* of the Hindus for which the Sufi term is *Zikra*.

Such, in brief, was the character of the early contact between India and the Islamic world. It was principally cultural. One might speculate on the turn that the course of Indian History would have taken if a closer political association had been established during these early centuries between this country and the enlightened court of Bagdad. But such speculation would serve no really useful purpose. If subsequently Providence thought it fit to introduce the stream of Islamic thought into India through the agency of a swashbuckler like Mahmud of Ghazni or a dashing cavalier of the type of Babar the Mughal, it must have been done with a deeper design than appears on the surface.

The two most remarkable qualities in Indian thought have been its powers of receptivity and assimilation with regard to new ideas. These qualities have not always been externally perceptible in the history of India's cultural evolution. But they have always been there and working out a state of things which would make India the pivot of human progress when mankind passes from the stage of narrow mentality to that of a broad and divinely illumined supramentality.

## THE FUTURE OF INDIA<sup>1</sup>

### I

THE future of India has in recent times been the subject of discussion among our thinkers. It is happy that they should have a keen desire to think out the problem and indicate the lines on which it should be approached. Some of them have already expressed their views which throw much light on the various aspects of the subject as well as on the present trend of our thinking public. It seems that the India of tomorrow has entered their imagination. Many of them believe that for India to live and grow into the fullness of her being, a better social order must be built on principles of justice and equity, and completely free from any kind of social and economic

<sup>1</sup> Some views based on Sri Aurobindo's writings. The quotations in this article are all of them from his following books and writings: *Bankim-Tilak-Dayananda*, *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, *The Life Divine*, *The Mother*, *The Renaissance in India*, *The Yoga and Its Objects*, *A Defence of Indian Culture*, *The Future Poetry*, *The Psychology of Social Development*, (the last three are series of articles in "Arya", 1916-21), "Karmayogin", (a Weekly Paper, 1908-10) and from an unpublished letter to Dilipkumar.

inequality. The problem of India, according to them, is the problem of bread, and an India well-fed and well-clothed will be an India happy and contented. Religion and spirituality are, in their opinion, hindrances to social progress, and are therefore tabooed in their scheme. Some speak of a new civilisation which, they think, is in the process of formation in India as a result of the fusion of cultures that has been taking place from the time of her contact with foreign countries. There are others who hold different views about the shape and character of the future Indian civilisation. 'Back to the past,' 'Back to Nature' are the slogans of a large section which insists on a return to the old and simple forms of rural culture. They religiously cling to certain ethical ideals mistakenly taking them to be the ideals of Indian civilisation which is founded, not, as they think, on the varying and therefore imperfect codes of morality, but on the eternal truths of the Spirit. Some again are full of faith that a greater India recovering all that was best in her past and with new powers acquired through centuries of experiences will emerge in response to the call of the time-spirit for fulfilling some divine purpose. The birth of this India through a spiritualised order, they feel sure, is an inevitable phenomenon in the inner scheme of things.

Whatever their differences, the foregoing views do all of them envisage a better and brighter future for India. But what is striking in the first two views, especially in the first, is that they do not properly

appreciate India's spiritual heritage, far less recognise its importance to her future rebuilding. And it is unfortunate that even an attitude of contempt is sometimes betrayed towards the spiritual genius of India which has all along been, and still is, the motive-force behind every aspect of her life and culture. The vision that India saw of the Infinite, the immortal truths that she discovered, the culture that she built up on her profound spiritual experiences have not only enriched beyond measure but have given its very character to her civilisation. It is therefore imperative that in a discussion of what the civilisation of India is going to be in the future, the very first consideration should go to that essential basis of her culture, the dominant tendency of her soul.

The norms and principles of Sociology developed in the West may be helpful to such an undertaking. But they must not rule any attempt to find out the methods by which to rekindle the soul of India so that a resurgence of her civilisation may be possible out of all the achievements of her great past. Sri Aurobindo's message has a significant bearing on this point. He has in many of his writings given clear hints as to what will be India's role in the future. His deep, penetrating and luminous exposition of her past has no parallel. The present article will, with the help of those writings, try to indicate the intrinsic values of Indian civilisation and show how indispensable they are to the rebuilding of India.

Europe gloried in her civilisation as the highest

creation of the human mind. But she is bewildered today at the wanton destruction of her long-cherished social and cultural values, and at the brutal exhibition of barbarous instincts in a large section of her so-called civilised humanity. The Philistine of today is also the barbarian who threatens both culture and society with complete annihilation. It may be power, but it is the power of the *asura*, the eternal enemy of God, into whose hands Europe has played through her exclusive emphasis on material aggrandisement as the only meaning and purpose of life. The culture of Europe has undoubtedly advanced the cause of human progress. But in spite of all its great achievements, it has failed to solve her problems, and has, moreover, been largely responsible for throwing her and through her many other countries into the clutches of dark and undivine forces. True to her nature, Europe's quest has been for the truths of life and mind, and with whatever of them she succeeded in attaining, she developed her culture and her religion of humanism which sang the glory of man and extolled him as his own redeemer. She forgot God and worshipped Mammon, with what result we are witnessing today. But the quest of India has been always for God, for the truths of the Spirit.

The earliest aspiration of man to awake to the divinity within is recorded in the Rig Veda. "That which is immortal in mortals and possessed of the truth, is a god and established inwardly as an energy working out in our divine powers. . . . Become



high-uplifted, O Strength, pierce all veils, and manifest in us the things of the Godhead." (IV. 2. 1; IV. 4. 5.). To strive for and to adhere to the eternal verities is India's *swadharma*. Spiritual freedom has always figured as her one high ideal, and life to her was the field for its pursuit. Her civilisation has grown out of her inner realisations which she applied with wonderful success to the varied forms of her creative life. "She saw the myriad gods beyond man, God beyond gods, and beyond God his own ineffable eternity; she saw that there were ranges of life beyond our life, ranges of mind beyond our present mind, and above these she saw the splendours of the Spirit . . . . She declared that there were none of these things which man could not attain if he trained his will and knowledge; he could conquer these ranges of mind, become the Spirit, become a God, become one with God, become the ineffable Brahman." The whole of India's life is governed by this, her sovereign sense of the Infinite. It is indeed the very master-key of her mind. From the very beginning of her history, her spiritual adventures have flowed like a stream, fertilising her national life, implanting in it the seeds they carried from Truth's Himalayan heights, the seeds that have continuously sprouted and flowered into her art and literature, her religion and philosophy, her science and politics; but the most glorious flowering, the most surging tide is yet to come, and all that has preceded has been the necessary preparation for it.

A section of our countrymen is inclined to think that the India of the ages is dead, that she has burnt out the oil of her life and now lacks the vitality to live again. The past is an anathema to them. They claim to be modern in their outlook. The Western ideas and institutions are easier for them to understand than the 'misty past of India' and her 'bullock-cart civilisation' as they contemptuously call it. They assert that India can best develop herself only by adopting Western institutions. It is curious that when Indian ideals are permeating the culture of many countries abroad, and are being increasingly admitted by them as influences that exalt and ennoble, and lead to a higher existence, when Europe stands dismayed at the failure of her own culture, we in India should reject our own ideals as 'old-world superstitions' and "take up the cast-off clothes of European thought and life, and straggle along in the old rut of her wheels, always taking up today what she had cast off yesterday."

India knows no death. She has become immortal by drinking *amrita* at the fountain of her ancient wisdom. Neither has she exhausted herself by her great creations in the past. The vicissitudes through which she had to pass have always been a trial of her strength. By surviving them, while earth's oldest civilisations have gone into oblivion leaving behind them nothing but their monuments, India proves her indomitable vitality, her deathless soul.

"India still lives and keeps the continuity of her inner mind and soul and spirit with the India of the

ages. Invasion and foreign rule, the Greek, the Parthian, and the Hun, the robust vigour of Islam, the levelling steam-roller heaviness of the British occupation and the British system, the enormous pressure of the occident have not been able to drive or crush the ancient soul out of the body her Vedic Rishis made for her. At every step, under every calamity and attack and domination, she has been able to resist and survive either with an active or a passive resistance. And this she was able to do in her great days by her spiritual solidarity and power of assimilation and reaction, expelling all that would not be absorbed, absorbing all that could not be expelled, and even after the beginning of the decline she was still able to survive by the same force, abated but not slain, retreating and maintaining for a time her ancient political system in the South, throwing up, under the pressure of Islam, Rajput and Sikh and Mahratta to defend her ancient self and its idea, persisting passively where she could not resist actively, condemning to decay each empire that could not answer her riddle or make terms with her, awaiting always the day for her revival. And even now it is a similar phenomenon that we see in process before our eyes. And what shall we say then of the surpassing vitality of the civilisation that could accomplish this miracle and of the wisdom of those who built its foundation not on things external but on the spirit and inner mind, and made a spiritual and cultural oneness the root and stock of her existence

and not solely its fragile flower, the eternal basis and not the perishable superstructure?"

## II

It is a short-sighted reading of Indian history to say that India fulfilled her mission through her great achievements in the past, and that the culture of India has nothing substantial to contribute to the reconstruction of her life for the future which will be a completely new creation. This is missing the central meaning of Indian culture as also its historical evolution. It is not merely its dominant spirituality, its living continuity and its stupendous life-force that are the only characteristics of Indian civilisation. There is about her a yet greater truth of which India is always conscious, and for whose fulfilment she has been preparing from the dawn of her history. The sense of that mission was always there as the motive-force behind every expression of her soul; and her culture has therefore been "a continuously enlarging tradition of the Godward endeavour of the human spirit."

"Indian culture recognises the spirit as the truth of our being and our life as a growth and evolution of the spirit in man. It sees God as the supreme and as the All and it sees man as a soul and power of the being of God in Nature. The progressive growth of man into self, into God, into spiritual existence by the development of our natural into our Divine being is for Indian thinking the significance of life and the aim

of human existence. . . . Always to India that idea of Self, God, Spirit and the moulding of man into that have been the fundamental power of her philosophy, religion, civilisation. The formal turn and the rhythmic lines of effort of this culture have grown through two complete external stages. The first was the early Vedic in which religion took its formal stand on the natural approach of the physical mind of man to the Godhead in the universe, but the initiates guarded the sacrificial fire of a greater spiritual truth behind the form of outward religious worship and conception. The second was the Purano-Tantrik in which religion took its outward stand on the deeper approach of man's psycho-physical mind to the Divine in the Universe, but a greater initiation opened the way to the most intimate truth and living of the spiritual life in all its profundity and infinite possibility of uttermost sublime experience. A third stage has been long in preparation, its idea often cast out in limited or large, quiet or striking spiritual movements and potent new disciplines and religions, but not successful yet, because the circumstances were adverse and the hour not come, which will call the community of men to live in the greatest light of all and to found their whole life on some fully revealed power and grand uplifting truth of the Spirit. Not until that third enlarging movement has come into its own, a thing not so easy as the religious reformer, the purist of the reason or the purist of the spirit constantly imagines and by that too hasty imagination falls short in his

endeavour, can Indian civilisation be said to have discharged its mission, to have spoken its last word and fully, *functus officio*, crowned and complete in its office of mediation between the life of man and the spirit . . . .”

“India of the ages is not dead nor has she spoken her last creative word; she lives and has still something to do for herself and the human progress. And that which is seeking now to awake is not an Anglicised oriental people, docile pupil of the West and doomed to repeat the occident’s success and failure, but still the ancient immemorable Shakti recovering the deepest self, lifting her head higher towards the supreme source of light and strength, and turning to discover the complete meaning and a vaster form of her Dharma.”

It is held that ancient India excelled only in religion and spirituality, and neglected material pursuits, and thereby hastened her downfall. This view, wholly erroneous and unfounded, is put forward to persuade against emulating the past of India in the matter of building up her future. The causes that led to India’s decline are not for this article to go into. But the fact must be asserted that India was also considerably great in the varied richness of her life-expression. Her abundant energy, her inexhaustible power of life and joy of life, and her almost unimaginably prolific creativeness have throughout the ages broken into a myriad vigorous activities that prove, if anything, the amazing virility of the race, its invincible puissance.

"India has not only had the long roll of her great saints, sages, thinkers, religious founders, poets, creators, scientists, scholars, legists; she has had her great rulers, administrators, soldiers, conquerors, heroes, men with the strong active will, the mind that plans and the seeing force that builds. She has warred and ruled, traded and colonised, and spread her civilisation, built polities and organised communities and societies, done all that makes the outward activity of great peoples. . . . It was not men of straw or lifeless or willless dummies or thin-blooded dreamers who thus acted, planned, conquered, built great systems of administration, founded kingdoms and empires, figured as great patrons of poetry and art and architecture or, later, resisted heroically imperial power and fought for the freedom of clan and people."

The contact between India and Europe has been mutually fruitful. Europe developed a tendency to subjectivism which began to effect subtle changes in her outlook on life; and India felt within her an impetus to scientific and intellectual pursuits, and, what is more important, an urge to discover the truth of her own being. Here, India has not been a blind imitator of Europe, as unhappily she is now wanted to be by a section of our countrymen. Neither has Europe betrayed any sign of an external imitation of Indian ideas. There is an inner cultural interchange which is cultivated through the power of assimilation. Blind imitation is slavish, and proves only the weakness and mental poverty of the imitator.

In any case, the benefit which India derived from her contact with Europe was one of the forces that helped to bring about the awakening in India early last century. There were, of course, greater forces at work to rouse India to a conscious effort towards the renewal of her destiny. "India has a secret Power that no nation possesses. All that she needs is to rouse in her that faith, that will. God has breathed life into her once more. Great souls are at work to bring about her salvation. The movement, of which the first outbreak was political, will end in a spiritual consummation. India is still in possession of her soul. The world will receive its message of emancipation from India." And "Bengal was the first workshop of this Shakti of India."

Raja Rammohan Roy was the starting-point. The inception of the Congress movement in 1885 is a significant phase of this awakening. But it was a new light which dawned in the mental horizon of India when at Dakshineswar "the flower of the educated youth of Calcutta bowed down at the feet of an illiterate Hindu ascetic, a self-illuminated ecstatic and 'mystic' without a single trace or touch of the alien thought or education upon him. The going forth of Vivekananda, marked out by the Master as a heroic soul destined to take the world between his two hands and change it, was a first visible sign to the world that India was awake not only to survive but to conquer." Sri Ramakrishna saw the vision of the Divine Mother and unsealed a fountain of forces that



through Vivekananda broke upon India like an avalanche and gave a vehement impetus to her rebuilding on the basis of her spiritual heritage. It was a conquest of the spirit of India won for his Master by that soldier of light, that mighty warrior of God. "Vivekananda was a soul of puissance if ever there was one, a very lion among men, but the definite work he has left behind is quite incommensurate with our impression of his creative might and energy. We perceive his influence still working gigantically, we know not well how, we know not well where in something that is not yet formed, something leonine, grand, intuitive, upheaving that has entered the soul of India and we say, 'Behold Vivekananda still lives in the soul of his Mother and in the souls of her children'."

In 1905 the Shakti of India was invoked again by the united voice of Bengal with the new-found *mantra* of *Bandemataram*. It was not the physical India, but 'the Eternal and Timeless India', her Power, her Spirit, who was then worshipped by an awakened people. The Mother revealed herself and responded to their prayer, and infused into them a new strength, a new inspiration. And the whole nation was swept into a grim determination to win her freedom. But the apparently political objective of the movement did not detract from its spiritual intention as envisaged above. The call went forth from its inspired high-priest: "You must know your past and recover it for the purposes of your future. First, therefore, become

Indians, recover the patrimony of your forefathers. Recover the Aryan thought, the Aryan discipline, the Aryan character, the Aryan life. . . . It is the spirituality of India, the sadhana of India, *tapasya*, *jnanam* and *shakti*, that must make us free and great. . . . India's work is world's work, God's work. Our captain is God Himself. He will lead us to the goal."

"India can best develop herself and serve humanity by being herself and following the law of her own nature." The following are the three broad lines indicated by Sri Aurobindo on which the work may be taken up: "The recovery of the old spiritual knowledge and experience in all its splendour, depth and fullness is the first, most essential work; the flowing of this spirituality into new forms of philosophy, literature, art, science and critical knowledge is the second; an original dealing with modern problems in the light of Indian spirit and the endeavour to formulate a greater synthesis of a spiritualised society is the third and most difficult." But how to understand India's *swadharma*, the secret law of her being? Mind will not take us farther than an objective knowledge of the past of India, her creations in the outer court of life. In order therefore to get deeply into the very heart of them and find out how the motivation is initiated there we must take to the subjective method of intuition and introspection, and thereby develop that inward vision which alone can reveal to us the sacred sanctuary of the flaming soul of India. Many of our countrymen following

exclusively the so-called scientific method of the West make suggestions for the reconstruction of India which, they do not perhaps realise, only expose the inadequacy of their knowledge of that inner India which, let us repeat, cannot be fully understood by intellect alone.

These suggestions are, as they are bound to be, nothing more than laboured elaborations of imported ideas without any connection with the original roots of Indian life and culture. But India must not cling to her past and refuse to move with the times. The truths of her great past she must rediscover and repossess for whatever strength they may give for building up her future. In any case, the Tomorrow is her immediate concern, and she must be alive to her mission which only her greater self can fulfil. "A great past ought to be followed by a greater future." The future, as the present is, may well be the fruit of the efforts that have preceded it; but with every fresh striving, the nature of the attainment will change, and change always for the better, the higher.

Even in honest and unbiased opinions, the past of India is sometimes characterised as being chiefly given to spiritual pursuits. A harmonious development of life, mind and body was not aimed at, they say. This is far from the truth. "The ancient Indian culture attached quite as much value to the soundness, growth and strength of the mind, life and body as the old Hellenic or the modern scientific thought, although for a different end and a greater motive. . . .

The new India will seek the same end in new ways under the vivid impulse of fresh and large ideas and by an instrumentality suited to more complex conditions; but the scope of her effort and action, and suppleness and variety of her mind will not be less, but greater than of old. Spirituality is not necessarily exclusive; it can be and in its fulness must be all-inclusive. . . . But the spiritual motive will be in the future of India, as in her past, the real original and dominating strain. To realise intimately the truth of spirit and to quicken and remould life by it is the native tendency of Indian mind, and to that it must always return in all its periods of health, greatness and vigour."

But this high spiritual ideal, far less its integral character, is not sufficiently affirmed in the aspirations of modern India. Many of those who are thinking about the future of this ancient country where spirituality was first born do not appear to be fully conscious of this which is the foremost ideal of India and indispensable to her rebuilding. Besides, whatever spiritual tendency there still is in India is more or less of an other-worldly nature and confined to the pursuit of individual liberation as the only aim of life, society and even life itself being regarded as hindrances to spiritual progress.

The problem today not only of India but of the whole world is essentially a problem of harmony. In India the ancient ideal of an all-embracing spirituality began to be dimmed in the racial consciousness

when *mayavada* (the theory of the cosmic Illusion) was adumbrated with all the vehemence that the human intellect could command, and was given a ready welcome possible only for a people which was then on the downward curve of its destiny. The ideal became more obscure in her vision when in a later period the glamour of a foreign culture blinded India—though temporarily—to the truths of her own self. In Europe the old Hellenic and the Christian ideals were gradually replaced by the complex forms of a materialistic civilisation which furnished man with enormous powers for satisfying his mental, vital and physical needs but widened the gulf between him and his God more than ever before. There have been attempts to reconcile these divergences, and solve the problems of mankind mainly through religion, politics and science. But as true harmony has not been found, none of them has been wholly successful.

### III

Every religion is spiritual in its origin. But when an institution is made of it and more importance is given to the institution than to the spirit of the religion, it begins to deteriorate. An institution cannot thrive without popular support. And for a religion to be popular means its coming down to the ordinary human level and satisfying the so-called religious needs of man which are more secular than spiritual.

Thus while their lamps have been kept burning by the few earnest seekers of truth belonging to them, almost all the religions of the world have compromised with the vital needs of man and permitted in their bodies the growth of various codes and dogmas and rituals and other forms of sectarianism which choke the religious aspirations of man and stand in the way of his spiritual progress. The ethical bias in many religions is also no less responsible for their failure to solve the problem. Morality is often confused with religion and spirituality. There is an element of morality in all religions, but the power of spirituality is a superior one. "Morality is an attempt to govern the outer conduct by certain mental rules or to form the character by these rules in the image of a certain mental ideal," whereas spirituality is a change into a higher consciousness through the realisation of the Divine within and without and making him the sole ruler of life. It is to live in, and act from, the truth of the Spirit. "It is a growth or waking into a new becoming or new being, a new self, a new nature."

The success of religion in India is due to its essential spiritual basis. But in spite of its broad and catholic outlook and a brilliant record of service in the cause of man's spiritual uplift, religion in India cannot be said to have reached that acme of greatness which her ancient seers expected of it. Its evolution began to be arrested when it showed a tendency to mere externalism and failed to get out of a fixed social system in which it was cabined. It could not grow

into that largeness of its innate spiritual character which is so necessary to the fulfilment of its original aim of liberating man into a higher existence. Yet for the seeker, every religion has its truths, and even ethical ideals have not been without their values to the social well-being of man.

Through politics man has tried to solve the problem of his external peace and freedom. But where is peace in the world today? and where is freedom? The chief concern of the State is to grow in power for fulfilling its selfish ambitions, and be secure against aggression by the stronger; and to serve these ends the resources of the country are blindly consumed, its nation-building works woefully neglected. A sense of war prevails everywhere. And when there is no actual hostility, there is at best an armed panicky peace, a panting lull before another burst of storm. And how can freedom thrive in a State which seeks to be absolute? Is it not beyond the power of a machine, which the State has become, to solve the problem of man who is not a machine but a complex being? One of the causes of this disharmony is the spirit of domination which is almost a concomitant of power when it is centralised in a system of government, whatever be its character. Conditions would not have been so distressing, had the State been in charge of men with a larger heart and a wider vision. Instead, men, who are victims of the worst passions, form the power-that-be almost everywhere. In ancient India these difficulties were

to some extent obviated, the former by a popular system of local self-government, and the latter by the selfless sages whose counsels were sought by the kings in every important matter of the State. The spiritual bias in Indian character was no less a help in that direction.

Through the culture of science man has opened into new horizons of knowledge, into deeper truths of Nature. But since he has not been able to attain sufficient psychological development, he has failed properly to manipulate the vast potencies of the universal Force released by science, with the result that they are being misused for satisfying the insensate earth-grabbing of power-intoxicated peoples, and the whole world is thrown into a vortex of the dark Forces. Indeed, the amenities of life offered by science pale into insignificance before the disasters wrought by it in supplying man with deadly weapons of destruction which threaten to reduce him to savagery.

Though man did not fully know what was the ultimate goal of his earthly adventure, yet all his creative endeavours throughout the ages have helped in his progress towards that goal of divine perfection which he is destined to attain as the next stage in his evolutionary ascent. This progress is shown in the height of his mental power man has reached today. It is also indicated in the growth of a seeking in him as well as of a feeling of discontent with the existing order of things. It is this seeking and the feeling of discontent which are the first glimmer of a spiritual awakening. But



the problems remain unsolved. Man has not been happy; he has no peace, no freedom, no prospect, nothing that can lead to a better condition of life. His highest aspiration which has always been in him, the aspiration for the Kingdom of God upon earth, is far from even a semblance of fulfilment.

The chief among the reasons of his failure is man's imperfect nature dominated by his ego. In religion the ego incites him to an attitude of superior separatism; and the image that he makes of his God ends by becoming a magnified image of his own self, and he would love to be pledged to a sect or dogma because it is his own creation. In politics it is symbolised in the State whose absolute power must be worshipped by all. In science it is glorified when man takes pride in his achievements and refuses to believe in anything that cannot be perceived by his physical senses. It is this ego which persists in every so-called triumph of human effort, and, as the instrument of adverse and undivine forces, tries to tempt man away from God and chain him for ever to a life whose be-all and end-all would be the satisfaction of his mental, vital and physical needs only. But the ego is not the whole man. There is in him the Divinity. And by awakening to it he can replace the domination of the ego in him by the rule of the Divine and change into a higher nature. The reason why human creations cannot be perfect is that the power of mind by which man produces his art, literature, religion, science and politics is a dividing power and cannot go beyond

finite constructions. How can he create perfect things with an instrument which is imperfect? Mind's is a separative function. "It cannot have the total knowledge of the whole which is necessary for the right knowledge of the part." (*The Life Divine*, Vol. I. p. 261). This is the element of error in all human knowledge to which may be traced the disharmonies in man's life and society. A creation will be perfect only when it will be the work of one who has himself become perfect by changing into a higher nature and who is united with the infinite Existence of which all finite things are embodiments.

It is this union with the creative Truth of the infinite Existence and a dynamic living in it that can perfect humanity and build a perfect society. A true harmony and a true perfection are the only solutions of all problems of mankind. "And it is only India that can discover the harmony, because it is only by a change—not a mere readjustment—of man's present nature that it can be developed, and such a change is not possible except by Yoga. The nature of man and things is at present a discord, a harmony that has gone out of tune. The whole heart and action and mind of man must be changed, but from within, not from without, not by political and social institutions, not even by creeds and philosophies, but by realisation of God in ourselves and the world and a remoulding of life by that realisation."

His failure to find a solution for the problems of life through the creations of his mind is not the only

reason why man should turn towards spirituality and try to discover a higher than mental power for the reconstruction of his life and society. The social evolution of man is marked by four broad stages forming a psychological cycle through which a nation or a civilisation is bound to proceed.<sup>1</sup> The first of these stages is called the Age of Symbol; the second, the Age of Convention; the third, the Age of Individualism; and the fourth, the Age of Subjectivism through which human civilisation in general is at present passing. Of course the progress has not been uniform everywhere. In Europe this spirit of subjectivism shows the promise of an awakening into deeper truths. In India indications are unmistakable of a spiritual renaissance, a rebirth of the old spirit into a new form of truth. All over the world signs of an awakening are beginning to be perceptible. The higher mind of humanity is gradually realising that it is only a life in the spirit, a total spiritual direction in all human affairs that can lift mankind out of the present chaos. But this consciousness has not yet gained sufficient ground. Nevertheless, the individuals in whom this new consciousness has dawned are the forerunners of the great future. With the increasing aspiration of man, the growing stress of the evolutionary Nature and the pressure of external conditions, they will swell in number and form the community

<sup>1</sup> Sri Aurobindo has elaborately discussed this subject in a series of articles called 'The Psychology of Social Development' in "Arya."

which will be the nucleus of the future world order, founded not on the tyranny of dictatorship, but on the harmonic principle of an integral spirituality.

“In spirituality lies then the ultimate, the only hope for the perfection whether of the individual or of the communal man; not the spirit which for its separate satisfaction turns away from the earth and its works, but that greater spirit which accepts and fulfils them. A spirituality taking up into itself man’s rationalism, aestheticism, ethicism, vitalism, corporeality, his aim of love and perfection, his aim of knowledge, his aim of beauty, his aim of power and fulness of life and being, revealing to them their divine sense and the conditions of their godhead, reconciling them all to each other, illuminating to the vision of each the way which they now tread in half-lights and shadows, in blindness or with a deflected sight, is a good which even man’s self-sufficient reason can accept; for it reveals itself surely in the end as a logical, inevitable development and consummation of all for which he is individually and socially striving. The evolution of the inchoate spirituality in mankind is the possibility to which an age of subjectivism is the first glimmer of awakening or towards which it at least shows the first profound potentiality of return. A deeper, wider, greater, more spiritualised subjective understanding of the individual and communal self and life and reliance on the spiritual light and spiritual means for the solution of its problems are the only way to true social perfection.

The free rule, that is to say, the predominant leading influence, guidance of the developed spiritual man—not the half spiritualised or the raw religionist—is our hope for the divine guidance of humanity. A spiritualised society is our hope for the communal happiness, or in words which, though liable to abuse by the reason and the passions, are still the most expressive we can find, a new kind of theocracy, the Kingdom of God upon earth, a theocracy which shall be the Government of mankind by the Divine in the hearts and minds of man." This is Sri Aurobindo's vision of the future social order. In the spiritual age that is coming upon mankind, India will figure as the inaugurator of that spiritualised society. The time is therefore come for her to summon up all her inner powers and with their help to discover that new truth, that new harmony on which her as well as the world's future will be built. It is to India that the sole privilege is given of affirming that spirituality is the only panacea for all the evils that afflict humanity. Great in the past, yet greater she will be in the future and accomplish the task given to her by God.

#### IV

The supreme need of India at the present moment is therefore to create such conditions as may be favourable to the birth of a greater India. The divine forces and personalities that have been working

to bring about that consummation point to that propitious time when she will renew herself in a spiritualised social order founded on an integral harmony. A widespread spiritual awakening is the first and most necessary condition, of which a beginning has been already made in India today in that a definite turn has been taken towards the completion of the third enlarging movement (referred to before) in the spiritual life of India through which she will discharge her mission. India has discovered the complete meaning and a vaster form of her Dharma on which a larger synthesis will be built. She has found the harmony between "the passionate aspiration of man upward to the Divine and the descending movement of the Divine leaning downward to embrace eternally its manifestation." The confluence thus created of man's Godward longings and God's earthly adventures will be the perennial source of light, power and joy for a life in the Spirit which will be India's gift to humanity. It will be, so to say, a blissful union of heaven and earth which, will blossom into that greater life for man. The power that will effect this union is the power of the Divine Shakti.

There are signs that conditions in life and nature are not only favourable to, but are pressing for, the emergence of a divinised humanity on earth. Sri Aurobindo is the Seer of a New Light which is descending upon the earth to effect through the Divine Shakti the above purpose of evolutionary Nature. He has shown the Path by which that new life will

be attainable to man. He has spoken the supreme Word: "As there has been established on earth a mental Consciousness and Power which shapes a race of mental beings and takes up into itself all of earthly nature that is ready for the change, so now there will be established on earth a gnostic Consciousness and Power which will shape a race of gnostic spiritual beings and take up into itself all of earth nature that is ready for this new transformation." This great Truth, unknown before, Sri Aurobindo has revealed in his latest book, his *magnum opus*, called *The Life Divine* in which he has so magnificently stated his whole philosophy.

The vision that has come to Sri Aurobindo is a lofty vision of the integral divinisation of human existence through the instrumentality of the Supramental Gnosis which is the highest creative power of God. Not the liberation of man from Nature but the liberation of man in Nature,—this is the unique message of the Master. This means that we are not simply to cut loose the bonds of Nature in order to pass into an indescribable silence but to divinely transform our natural being in all its members and enjoy the utmost freedom within Nature herself. Sri Aurobindo's ideal consists not in mere self-realisation and in an escape into the transcendental bliss of a far-off Heaven but in the dynamic self-manifestation of the Spirit in the conditions provided by Mother Earth. The fulfilment of this ideal lies in the evolution of man into superman who will represent Man

thoroughly transfigured in every fibre of his being through the transforming touch of the Supermind. "This supramental change is a thing decreed and inevitable in the evolution of the earth-consciousness; for its upward ascent is not ended and mind is not its last summit. But that the change may arrive, take form and endure, there is needed the call from below with a will to recognise and not deny the Light when it comes, and there is needed the sanction of the Supreme from above. The power that mediates between the sanction and the call is the presence and power of the Divine Mother. The Mother's power and not any human endeavour and tapasya can alone rend the lid and tear the covering and shape the vessel and bring down into this world of obscurity and falsehood and death and suffering Truth and Light and Life divine and the immortal's Ananda."

This is the ideal for which Sri Aurobindo stands, the ideal of a divine life for man. Sri Aurobindo shows the Light when there is darkness everywhere. He shows the Path when there is none before man. The long night of human travail will be followed by the sun of a new truth which will remake man into a spiritualised being and enable him to start afresh on his journey on earth. That future of his is as certain as was his evolution into the mental life out of the animal. Mind has reached the summit of its possibility. The time has now come for the Supermind to be active in earth-principle and evolve out of man a supramental being. The only condition of this change



is readiness for it on the part of man. And he would grow in readiness, if he could aspire in all the depth and passionate intensity of his soul, and have a pure, candid and unshakable faith burning upwards to heaven, and could sincerely and in every part of his being surrender himself to the Divine Shakti who alone can liberate him from his present bondage to Ignorance into the luminosity of a higher consciousness and transform his present imperfect and ego-ridden nature into the perfect nature of the Divine.

How true was what Tagore said to Sri Aurobindo when he met him in 1928: "You have the Word, and we are waiting to hear it from you; India will speak through your voice to the world, 'Hearken unto me!' " Sri Aurobindo speaks to humanity the last creative word of India in the same way as her Vedic Rishis spoke the first. He envisages a new Man, a new Society, a new Civilisation; and his message is indeed the greatest that man has ever heard from the Masters of the race. The initiation in India of this inevitable change in man's life and society surely means a brighter future for this ancient country. India possesses the key to the progress of humanity. It is by that key of Yoga that Sri Aurobindo has unlocked the doors of hitherto unknown spiritual treasures and made them available to mankind.

The future of India as also of the world will depend on how she opens to these truths and manifest them in the life of the individual and the community. The great civilisation of India which still glows in

the memory of the race was built on the eternal verities discovered by the Vedic Seers. The future of India will see a greater civilisation, because it will be built on a greater Truth which has come to the vision of Sri Aurobindo. That will indeed be the most glorious flowering of India's spiritual genius, the fulfilment of all her dreams and aspirations, her strivings and seekings. This new civilisation will be a spiritual creation. It will be the beginning of a world movement, and will not therefore be confined within the geographical borders of India. It will have inherent in it the power of extending itself to the farthest limits of the earth; and wherever people will be ready, a nucleus of it will form and will gradually merge in the greater whole. One of its outstanding features will be its freedom from the rule of the collective ego. The present civilisation, as has been already pointed out, is governed by this undivine principle and has therefore failed to find a permanent solution for the problems of mankind. It has grown too big for man's limited capacity to manage. In the spiritual civilisation of the future this problem will not arise, since its corporate life will be constituted by spiritualised individuals and not by the semi-animal human beings, the slaves of ego. The new and vast means of life, which human civilisation in its present phase is, will be utilised for higher and greater ends by the spiritualised society.

It is not possible to define what exactly will be the essential elements of this new civilisation. They

will be determined by the Divine Shakti who will create it. But there is no doubt that they will be spiritual in their intention. Its poetry will sing of the New Dawn. "It will be the utterance of the deepest soul of the spiritual man and of the universal spirit in things, not only with another and a more complete vision, but in the very inmost language of the self-experience of the soul and the sight of the spiritual mind." Its art will express the truth of the spirit, the beauty and the delight of existence. Its education will embrace all knowledge but its whole trend will be to unfold the self. Its science will seek to know not only the world and Nature in all her processes and use that knowledge for material ends but also the workings of the Divine in them and His purpose that lies behind every natural phenomenon. Its sociology will regard every individual as a soul growing to perfection and will seek help and power from the perfected ones for the common well-being of the society, providing innumerable opportunities of self-development for all according to their individual needs. Its economics will give all men the joy of work according to their nature and free leisure to grow inwardly as well as a simply rich and beautiful life. These will be the essential aims of the principal forms of culture in the initial stage of the spiritual civilisation, as indicated by Sri Aurobindo. In a life in the spirit, possibilities of self-expression will be infinite. The creative life in the new society will therefore go on enlarging its domain to greater

aims along with its progress in higher realisations.

The future of India will be this new civilisation, this new society. The Shakti of India was long preparing for this consummation. All the past endeavours of the race were directed to this end. It is this great future of India that will explain her hidden meaning. Every nation has a soul, a Shakti. So also has India; but what is peculiar about her is that, unlike other nations and true to her spiritual genius, she is conscious of her soul and also of what may be called her over-soul, the Mahashakti. Herein lies the secret of India, of 'the Eternal and Timeless India,' the Bharata-Shakti, who is the dispenser of her destiny. 'India is an Idea, a Truth, a Spirit', 'Mother India is the Mother of the world,' —these are not words of vain dreaming, but utterances of the soul, glimpses of a great truth. The sense of oneness of all existence in the Mahashakti and of that Shakti guiding all existence is ingrained in the racial consciousness of India. "The Mahashakti is the universal way of being of the divine Conscious Force. She is the Universal Mother who creates all these beings and contains and enters, supports and conducts all these million processes and forces . . . . She works out whatever is transmitted by her transcendent consciousness from the Supreme and enters into the worlds that she has made; her presence fills and supports them with the divine spirit and the divine all-sustaining force and delight without which they could not exist." In her transcendent way

of being, the Conscious Force is the original supreme Shakti, who stands above the worlds and links the creation to the ever unmanifest mystery of the Supreme. Through the Mahashakti she guides the terrestrial evolution in which her ultimate object is to effect "the flowering of the life and soul and mind into the infinity of the Spirit by bringing down into this world of ignorance the Supramental light, the Truth life and Truth creation."

India is the only country in the world to whom spirituality is the very breath of life. She has therefore been chosen by the Divine Mother as her suitable instrument. Not only that, she is even her conscious formation. Many a time has the Mother revealed herself to the vision of India. She was adored as Aditi in the Vedas and worshipped as the Mahashakti in the Puranas and the Tantras; and through countless other emanations she has illumined the hearts of her devotees and fulfilled their religious aspirations. But her manifestation in India today is of a completely different character. The stupendous work that she will accomplish this time requires the pouring of greater forces into the earth-consciousness and an action in it more direct than before. She has therefore in her infinite grace descended into the mire of ignorance in order to remould the human personality into the divine Nature; for, that is the purpose of the individual way of being of the Conscious Force in which "she embodies the power of the Transcendental and the Universal,

the two vaster ways of her existence."

It is indeed glorious that this holy land should once again be the centre of a spiritual activity which is guided by divine personalities and the like of which has never before been witnessed in human history. In fact, it is the very summit of man's spiritual endeavour and is going to make a new history for him. A greater future for India is not its only aim; it seeks to help in the redemption of the whole human race.

The inner meaning of the supreme Shakti's descent as an incarnation will be fully unveiled to those who will feel within them a deep spiritual urge and take a plunge into the currents of a new life that are streaming in India today from their springs in a higher world brought down by the Mother out of compassion for her distressed children of the earth. And an awakening is already there. The glimmerings of the dawn at the advent of the Mother are coming out to be visible to those who have heard her call. In her sacred temple her children from far and near are beginning to gather to re-vision the Ancient Mother in a new way of her being, worship her by offering themselves at her feet and be prepared for her work. "The One whom we adore as the Mother is the divine Conscious Force that dominates all existence, one and yet so many-sided that to follow her movement is impossible even for the quickest mind and for the freest and most vast intelligence. The Mother is the consciousness and force of the Supreme and far above all she creates. But something of her ways

can be seen and felt through her embodiments and the more seizable because more defined and limited temperament and action of the goddess forms in whom she consents to be manifest to her creatures."<sup>1</sup>

The world today is under the shadow of a terrible disaster. Dark and undivine forces are abroad. Driven by the pressure of the Light that is descending upon the earth they have come out and taking advantage of man's egoistic ambitions are desperately trying to destroy all higher values and frustrate the purpose of the Divine. But as the descent of the Light is inevitable, their fall is certain; and their present rise is like a flickering that precedes extinction. For, when God strikes He strikes straight; and His victory is sure. Who then will present the divine front and baffle the *asuras*? And who else can do that but India where the supreme Shakti has manifested herself and the source of a tremendous spiritual power, unknown before, has been discovered as also the means of putting it at the service of earthly life? It is the Divine Mother who by that power will usher in a higher order of life and build a greater India and liberate humanity from the clutches of hostile forces.

A new age is coming upon mankind. And as always in history, the dawn will first be heralded in

<sup>1</sup>The Mother's three ways of being the Transcendental, the Universal, and the Individual, and her four Powers, Maheshwari, Mahakali, Mahalakshmi and Mahasaraswati, which are her four outstanding Personalities, as well as some of the basic principles of his Yoga, Sri Aurobindo has discussed in a little book called *The Mother*.

the East, and this time in its very heart, in India, who, reborn into her Shakti as the gracious and majestic Mother of the world and crowned with the sun-laurels of a unique spiritual conquest, will bring in order where there was chaos, light where there was darkness, love where there was hatred, truth where there was falsehood, beauty where there was ugliness, peace where there was strife, joy where there was sorrow, freedom where there was bondage, immortality where there was death. This is how she will create a new world, establish a new heaven on earth and lead mankind to its divine perfection. And in this way will she fulfil her ancient vision and build up her spiritual empire in the soul of humanity.









